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FRANCIS FLEETWOOD RYND

Non sine risu magnoque amore

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MRS. GREEN

I

"JAMES"

"A BETTER-NATURED little feller nor Green never stepped in a pair o' boots," said Mrs. Green, thoughtfully. "But grieve! ah, 'e do grieve! I took 'im in las' night to see pore James Wood a-dyin', but 'e 'ad n't set there two minutes afore 'e ups an' outs with a shillin'. 'In Gawd's name get 'im a drop o' brandy,' ses 'e. An' out 'e runs a-cryin' like a child. Could n't abear to see it, 'e could n't."

She paused, and looked at me with mournful triumph.

"No!" said I, with sympathetic incredulity.

"Yes," said Mrs. Green, "them was 'is wery words. 'In Gawd's name get 'im a drop o' brandy,' ses 'e, an' 'e planks down the shillin' on the table that careless it might 'ave been a farden—never lookin' at it twice nor nothin'—an' away 'e rushes. I must n't never take 'im *there* no more. Ah, 'e 'as a feelin' 'eart! You could n't want a better-natured little chap. But brandy won't never do pore James no good no more, nor nothin' else."

She sighed deeply, and made a spasmodic dab at a shelf she had already dusted twice in the intervals of our conversation.

Mrs. Green is the wife of our gardener. He was once a sailor on an old coasting trader. I hear that Green's powers of swearing are something phenomenal, and apparently he exhibits them on request with the best good-will in the

world. He is short and tubby, the regular cut of a seaman, with a fat face that is never anything less than beaming.

When we are "out of a cook" or "looking for a housemaid"—a search in which we never seem to be entirely successful—Mrs. Green comes up to do a day's charing.

"How *is* poor James?" I asked, for I found the feeling heart of Green rather a difficult subject to pursue.

"'E 's a-prayin' to go," said Mrs. Green, fixing me with a tragic eye; "a-prayin' to go, 'e is. Oh! 'e do cry somethin' awful to Gawd to take 'im. It rends the garmingts to 'ear 'im. I don't think there 's many in this village 'cept me an' 'is mother as knows what that young man 'as gorned through. Ah! it 'ill be a blessid release."

She turned with resolution and completely re-dusted the shelf.

"You go in very often to help them, I know, Mrs. Green," said I, after a minute.

" There till twelve las' night," said Mrs. Green, instantly ceasing to dust. " I sits with 'im, you see, while Mrs. Wood lays down. ' But don't blame me, Mrs. Wood, my dear,' ses I, ' if 'e goes off that sudding I can't call you,' ses I, ' because 'e might go off in the twinkle of a heye, so to speak,' ses I, ' as no one knows so well as you.' ' Mrs. Green,' ses she, ' you 've been a kind neighbor to me,' ses she; ' no better ever was,' ses she; ' an' 'Eving bless you for hall your goodness,' ses she, ' which is what I never can.' "

She spoke with bowings and foldings of the arms and a dramatic mingling of dignity and politeness.

" I am glad Mrs. Wood appreciates your kindness," said I.

" ' *I'll* lay yer out, James,' ses I," said Mrs. Green, with startling suddenness. " ' I 'll lay yer out, come what may,' that 's what I ses to 'im yesterday. 'E 'as my promise, an' what ever time the call comes, mornin', noon, *or*

night, I 'll keep my word. It comforted 'im a lot, that did."

" I am sure it must have," I said.

A few days later, as we were still looking unsuccessfully for a housemaid, Mrs. Green came up again to " char."

" 'Is aunt in London 's to lay 'im out," she told me, with dignified resignation. " I 'ave n't no feelin' about it. I *should* 'ave liked to do it, of course, but we hall 'as our little trials, an' it 's a thing as should suttenly be kep' in the family if there 's some one 'andy. Mrs. Wood, she apolergized; but I 'ave n't no feelin' about it. James harsked 'is aunt 'isself, an' she 's a-comin' down as soon as 'e 's gone. But 'e won't make much of a corp, though it grieves 'is pore mother to think it. 'E 's too wore away. 'E won't do much credit to no one's layin' out."

She sighed gloomily.

" Did you know 'e was baptized yesterday into the Church, Miss ?"

"But Mrs. Wood is chapel," said I, surprised, "and so is Wood himself."

"Chapel is as chapel does," said Mrs. Green, firmly. "'Six months my boy 's laid ill,' ses Wood to me, 'an' not one of my hown people come a-nigh me—me that 'ave been chapel regular since I was married,' ses 'e! 'But the parson,' ses 'e, 'an' the young ladies, an' the good little curick, an' all the church 'ouses in the parish,' ses 'e, 'as surprised me with their kindness an' their port-wine,' ses 'e, 'a-comin' constant an' a-readin' to my James; an' since 'e wishes it, a Christian 'e shall die.'"

"But we 're all Christians, Mrs. Green," said I, "Church or chapel."

"That 's your kindness, Miss," said Mrs. Green, with a superior smile. "But Wood 'opes as 'ow it 'ill give some of they Dissentiers a nasty turn."

II

"ME FIRST"

"DID you know as I was twist married, Miss?" asked Mrs. Green.

"No, were you really, Mrs. Green?" said I.

I was recovering from a day's headache, and Mrs. Green had brought me up my dinner and lamp. She was standing at the foot of my bed, regarding me with a mournful thoughtfulness and a reminiscent eye.

"I was," said she, in impressive tones, "twist married. To my sorrer."

"Why—were n't you happy?" I asked.

"'Appy!" said Mrs. Green, shaking her head darkly, "'oo 's 'appy? No, I 'ope I knows my place better than to want to be 'appy! Comferable is all I harsk."

"And were n't you even comfortable?" I asked.

Mrs. Green replied with a weighty look.

"Drinked," she remarked, significantly. "And did n't drink kind, neither. Drinked wicious."

"Ah!" said I, returning her glance.

"If I 'd a-known it afore I married I never would 'ave took 'im," she went on, solemnly. "Never! Not if it was ever so! Not for all 'is harskin'! But I knowed it no more than the babe unborn. An' them as should 'ave warned me did n't. So I married. To my sorrer."

There was a moment's silence.

"Seein' you a-lyin' there reminds me of 'im that sharp," said Mrs. Green, thoughtfully.

"Why?" I asked, hastily.

"'Im on 'is deathbed, I means," explained Mrs. Green. "'E was a 'orrid sight—'urt in a naccident. It some'ow strook me to see 'im so 'elpless an' so quiet. 'Is way was to begin

a-'ittin' an' a-rampagin' d'rec'ly 'e got 'ome, an' when there 'e lay just as you 're a-doin', Miss—that quiet an' pale—it turned me all up inside. You could see 'e was took for death."

"I could 'a' stood 'is drinkin'," she added, suddenly, "an' I could 'a' stood 'is 'ittin's, though 'e knocked me about crooel. But it was 'is other ways as come so 'ard."

She paused and looked at me.

"Brought 'em to the 'ouse,'e did," she said tragically below her breath, "an' fed 'em with the food I 'd earned."

This was beyond comedy.

"You poor soul!" I said, not knowing what else to say.

"Ah, yes," said Mrs. Green, meditatively. Then she added: "Bless yer, I ain't the honly one. 'Igh an' low, rich an' pore, *that* sort 's heverywheres. Takes hall an' gives nothink." She sighed.

"Well, there 's good an' there 's bad. I 'ad better luck the second time, for Green 's a

wery different kind o' little feller—nothin' near so fine to look at, but a deal better to live with. But I carry 'is marks with me to this day, an' they 'll be my death when the time comes. Kicked me, 'e did, when 'e was drunk." She put her hand to her side.

"It 's a-growin' an' a-growin'," she said, "an' when it touches the 'eart I 'm done for."

Gloom struggled with satisfied dignity in her aspect. I could find no words. I looked at her with eyes that, I hope, expressed the sympathy and horror she expected. "The doctors can't do nothin'," she said. "Too near the vitil orgins. An' I 've 'ad the very best, too. One in Southampton as costed me twelve and six, and then again jus' arter I married Green. 'Green,' I ses, ses I, 'it ain't no manner of use. Don't you get too used to 'avin' me make yer comferable, Green,' ses I, 'for I may be tooked to 'eving any moment,' ses I, 'an' then where 'll you be?' But Green, 'e ses, ses 'e, 'Try again,' ses 'e, 'try again. Hany-

think to save yer, R'anna,' ses 'e, 'hanythink to save yer.' So I 'ad a doctor from London, an' Green paid 'im two guineas down. Ah, a feelin' little feller is Green. But 'e could n't do nothin', no more than the other one. Oh, 'ow my mother wep' when she 'eard it! She took it dreadful 'ard, for she ain't no other girl but me." She looked at me with an indescribable air of lofty dejection.

"Dear, dear!" said I.

"'My good woman,' ses 'e to me," said Mrs. Green, stepping swiftly back and assuming a manly and judicial air—"'e 'avin' an 'igh manner like"—she dropped in an explanatory aside, "'My good woman, *when* you falls, you falls to your death.' Them was 'is wery words. '*When* you falls, you falls to your death.'"

Again she paused, and looked to observe the effect upon me.

"What did he mean?" I asked.

"Well may you harsk," said Mrs. Green.

" 'E meant that if I trips—on the stairs, in the street, hanywheres—I dies! Along o' what would 'appen inside."

I did not dare inquire further. Mrs. Green's details of such matters are apt to be appallingly lucid. I take her statements for granted.

" It must be a great trial to you," I said, hastily.

" It 's a trial to Green," said Mrs. Green. " Ah, 'e do grieve! Cries over it, 'e does, though 'e thinks I don't know it. Many 's the pint of 'alf-an'-'alf I 've seen 'im choke over, a-thinkin' of me. A better-natured little feller never stepped in a pair of boots! 'E knows I vally 'im, 'avin tried both sorts."

" I am sure you do," said I.

" But I forgive John afore 'e died," continued Mrs. Green, observing me with an eye of solemn piety. " 'E was always a bird of Paradise, 'ere to-day an' gone to-morrer. It was n't no good a-layin' up o' things agin such a one as 'e. I seed that, so I forgive 'im."

"Bird of passage, you mean," I said, mildly. "Don't you?"

"No, we 'ad n't no passages in our 'ouse in Golding Lane," said Mrs. Green, meditatively. "You step straight out of the street into the livin'-room, as it were." She sighed again.

"Ah, yes. 'Anna,' ses 'e, 'forgive me,' ses 'e," she continued, "an' there 'e lay a-dyin'. An' at first I felt as 'ow I reelly could n't. I could 'ave forgive 'im 'is blows, an' 'is drinkin's, an' 'is langwidge, but it was the other things what come so 'ard. 'Forgive me,' ses 'e again, 'cause 'e could n't die comferable, seein' 'e was frightened, as well 'e might be. An' there I stood an' could n't say a word, for 'e 'ad done me crooel 'arm. I knowed by then what 'is kick 'ad done for me. I sha'n't never 'ave no child to call my hown."

She stopped, and for a moment an unmixed feeling came into her eyes. She looked at the wall in silence, forgetting me. It was but for an instant.

" Well, there was n't no good to be got out of sayin' no," she resumed. " What was done was done, an' there was n't no undoin' of it. I seed that. I leaned down acrost 'im, for 'e was nearly gone, an' I ses, ses I, 'I 'll 'ave to say " forgive me " myself some day,' ses I, ' and then I 'd 'ave it on my mind I 'd made your deathbed 'ard. I forgive yer, John,' ses I, ' drink, an' women, an' blows, an' all,' ses I, ' an' Gawd forgive you as I do.' An' I did. It was n't jus' words. I forgive 'im all. It was easier with 'im so unusual quiet. Well, it 's what we hall come to."

She paused again, sighed profoundly, looked round with gloom, picked up her tray, and made a dramatic, if heavy, exit.

She met my sister outside. " I 've been a-cheerin' of Miss Meary up," she explained.

III

"'ARRIET"

"I CARN'T listen to no talkin' this arternoon, Miss," said Mrs. Green rapidly, continuing to stone raisins with the utmost swiftness, and an air of unspeakable determination upon her countenance. "These 'ere mus' be done in narf-a-nour *hat* the latest, hor cook 'ill never get hover it, she a-knowin' well as 'ow I never wastes no time a-chatterin' meself, an' a-trustin' to me 'opeful."

"Very well, Mrs. Green," said I, meekly.

Mrs. Green stoned sternly on for half a minute; then a sudden thought appeared to strike her. Her countenance relaxed; she paused, and gazed earnestly at the fire.

" 'Arriet was 'er name," she said, thoughtfully, after a moment's sorrowful meditation, " now that I comes to think of it."

" Whose name ? " said I.

" 'Arriet's," replied Mrs. Green, from depths of still deeper thought. We were in the servants' hall — Mrs. Green, because she was helping in the preparations for a " teachers' tea "; I, because I had discovered Mrs. Green there.

" And what did Harriet do ? " I asked, conversationally.

" She never done it, pore soul," said Mrs. Green, gloomily.

There was a short silence. Then, perceiving that Mrs. Green was momentarily descending yet further into dark abysses of tragic reminiscence, whence she might emerge at untold distances from Harriet, I said, firmly:

" What was it Harriet could n't do, Mrs. Green ? "

" Fur be it from *me* for to say as she

could n't 'a' done it," replied Mrs. Green, rousing herself with a sigh; " for let us never judge no one as is less blessid than hourselves, life bein' long, an' 'er legs strong enough, which 'ad she a-practised it steady till 'er death, as it were, she might 'a' come to it in time, if not too weak through hage. But whatever may 'ave been the cause—which many 's the bootshop we tried, but all too small in the toes—there it was! She never done it."

Mrs. Green sighed again, and commenced, with a bitter air, to stone raisins violently into the yellow basin upon her lap.

" Not as I can was'e me time a-listenin' to no talk this arternoon," she added, sternly, " with me hown work a-cryin' hout for me at 'ome, as it were, an' Green that dangerous when crossed in 'is food."

Silence ensued accordingly.

" Ah, *'ow* I remembers it, though gorned for rever more," said Mrs. Green, suddenly

letting her hands fall. "Sech 'appy, 'appy hours—light refreshments an' hall complete, if taken genteel so 's to las' round, an' the voylinsella a-'owlin' steady in the bass, an' the penny whistle a-flingin' horf the top toon that heasy an' careless, for hall the worl' like a voylin ¦hor a concertina—an' hevery one ser light-'earted an' playful, a-changin' of partners sudding, and a-twirlin' of 'em roun', which David afore the hark could 'a' been nothin' to it, as was perreps a strange place to choose, but useful, through no one not bein' hable for to say arterwards as dancin' was n't 'ighly proper, in spite of parsings, as thinks different when low."

Mrs. Green paused for breath, and gazed darkly into the fire. I preserved a discreet silence.

"'Lif' the dress *an'* point the toes,' ses 'e," she continued after a minute, groaning slightly—"a-pointin' of it 'isself mos' genteel an' a-raisin' of the trouser graceful—'e bein'

gardener at the Williamsis when at 'ome in 'is corduroys, but a-givin' of dancin' lessons at twelve for five in the chapel meetin'-room, as 'ad n't been blessid, through lack of fun's, when the rest of the chapel was got done—which 'is spare hours was many through Mr. Williams bein' a City gentleman an' a-settin' hup there constant. An' es fur es the *dress* went, 'Arriet got it 'igh enough, I grant you —she bein' *mos'* willin', pore thing—but point the toe she could not, nor never 'ad no 'opes of so doin', hall 'er toes a-hendin' together in a line, as it were, as square as a nangkerchif, which she felt it bitter."

"She must have," said I, sympathetically.

"Ah, you feels for 'er, Miss," said Mrs. Green, gloomily, "a-knowin' what it is yerself, which never could I so do, of course, me a-takin' pointed threes, excep' for me corns as obligis me hotherwise. But corns was n't nothin' to 'Arriet's feet. 'Oh, 'Anna,' ses

she a-weepin'—she an' me bein' cook-a-house-maid at Mrs. Jamesis hat the time, which I give notice soon arterward through Mrs. James a-sayin' as 'ow 'er bedroom ceilin' was a-comin' down in bits upon 'er as she lay in bed with me practisin' me walzin' hupstairs, as well as I knowed to be 'er renvy an' malice, to say nothin' of hall 'er huncharitableness, she bein' hunable for to ser much as 'op 'erself—'*never* shall I be hable for to do it,' ses 'Arriet, ses she, 'an' 'Enry a-settin' sech store be dancin',' ses she."

"Who was Henry?" I asked, as Mrs. Green again perforce paused for breath.

"'Enry was 'er young man," replied Mrs. Green, sighing slightly, "or so she 'ad 'opes, though not serting, 'e a-layin' hout to be mos' genteel in hevery way, an' a-lookin' 'igh, as well 'e might do." She sighed again heavily.

"Hanythink ser gentlemanly as 'Enry in 'is checks an' 'is curl under 'is bowler 'at," she added, "as 'e wore when walkin' out a-Sun-

days, together with 'is smile and 'is blew tie, I never 'opes to see again nor never shall."

At this juncture a door slammed violently somewhere in the direction of the kitchen. Mrs. Green started.

" For 'Eving's sake, Miss, lemme get hon with me work "—she said, loudly and despairingly, as one who has asked often and in vain —" as many 's the time I 've begged you so to do this arternoon, though in hall hours of hidleness mos' pleased for to 'ear you talk."

We listened breathlessly. No sound came from the kitchen regions.

" The way cook loses 'er temper, pore soul," said Mrs. Green, relapsing resignedly, " when tried by a little hextra work, is 'ardly Christian — a-slammin' of the door to the startle of the 'ole 'ouse, when hall on us is a-workin' 'ard for to save 'er, an' a-wearin' of hourselves to the bone, as it were, to say nothing of hangry 'usbings at 'ome a-goin' without their teas—though well Green knows

to 'ide 'is wrath, if sech 'e feels," added Mrs. Green, suddenly flushing, " seein' as 'ow nonsense is a thing I never 'ave stood nor never will."

" But what did you reply to Harriet?" I asked.

" ' 'Arriet,' ses I," replied Mrs. Green, solemnly, putting an unstoned raisin carefully down, " ' 't is the will of 'Eving, an' as sech to be bore patient,' ses I, ' together with stoutness an' hall them hother trials, 'Arriet,' ses I, ' as you doubtless feels severe. Which no amount of twelves at five can do what is thus clearly forbad you, me pore soul,' ses I, kind, ' you 'avin' the feet you 'ave.' "

" I hope Henry did n't mind her not being able to learn to dance," I said, thoughtfully.

Mrs. Green's face changed; a solemn enthusiasm lit her eye. She groaned impressively.

" Ah!" she said. " 'Ad 'Enry been like hother men, well might hall 'a' been hover an'

'Arriet's boundin' 'eart for rever broke. But 'e were not. 'E were a trewly noble young feller, a-settin' of hothers steady afore 'isself—as many 's the time 'e eggsplained to me careful—an' not willin' for to discouridge no one. ' 'Arriet,' ses 'e, pityin'-like, ' 'eavy you are, 'Arriet,' ses 'e, ' an' likewise giddy in the 'ead,' ses 'e.

" Which you 'ad to lif' the pore thing aroun' you in jumps, as it were "—explained Mrs. Green in a compassionate aside—" when 'opin' for to dance with 'er—'er weight bein' twelve stone hodd an' 'er wais' thirty, to say nothin' of 'er never bein' hable for to get 'erself accustomed to a-rushin' roun' ser fas', she hallways a-closin' of 'er eyes firm from beginnin' to hend, an' a-fallin' down flat an' pale as soon as you let 'er go.

" ' But do we marry for the gay dance ? ' ses 'Enry, ses 'e," resumed Mrs. Green with a solemn wave of the arm, " 'e bein' a churchgoin' young feller an' a-knowin' of the

Scripchers —' leastways does wimming so do ?' ses 'e. '*Never*,' ses 'e firm, ' we hall a-knowin' as 'ow their place is hin the cradle, as it were,' ses 'e pohetic, ' or a-singin' as the crickets on the 'earth,' ses 'e. Which of course sing they do not," added Mrs. Green, thoughtfully, " they 'avin' nothin' but a chirp, but supposed so for to do in po'try, together with hother mistakes, sech as ' 'Er brow is like the snowdrift, 'Er neck is like the swan,' which 'ideous would it be, if true."

" Then did Henry marry her ?" I asked.

" ' Let hus then forgive an' forget hall sech shortcomin's in them as loves hus so dear,' ses 'e," continued Mrs. Green, rousing herself hastily, " if you 'll not hinterrupt me quite so horften, Miss, me 'avin' me work to do an' hunable for to set 'ere a-listenin' to you hall day—' which when obliged for to go a-dancin' meself after marridge, as may be, of course, the case,' ses 'e, ' 'ow comfortid shell I feel for to pickcher you a-doin' of your rumble

dooties safe at 'ome a-preparin' of comfits for a lovin' 'usbing when wore with the labors of the fiel', as it were,' ses 'e mos' bewtiful. ' Which we carn't hall on hus 'ave the gifts as makes hus for to shine in serciety; an' fur be it from me for to carst you horff, 'Arriet, an' take hup with another girl as might do me more credit,' ses 'e."

Mrs. Green paused, panting, and fanned herself with one hand while she looked at me with an admiring smile.

" It was very nice of him," said I.

" Well may you say so, Miss," replied Mrs. Green, subsiding with a sigh, " an' if there was honly more like 'im this world 'ud be a nappier pilgrimidge for many a lovin' female. Ah, 'ow that pore girl wep'! Gratitood ? I grant you, gratitood it were! ' You sha'n't never regret it, 'Enry,' ses she, a-sobbin'."

" And did he, do you think ?" I asked.

" You carn't never tell with hother wimming's 'usbings," said Mrs. Green, thought-

fully, " they halways bein' pleased for to say 'ow un'appy they har. But it must 'a' come 'ard on a man as 'ad 'is nachrul pride in 'isself, an' 'is temper when put out—along o' most on 'em, exceptin' Green, as knows better. It was n't honly as pore 'Arriet 'ad n't no accomplishments, as hall carn't be hexpected to manidge—dancin,' singin', pianner, pomes, an' sech-like, 'as come as heasy to me, of course, as 'owlin' to a dog, as it were; but 'er figger——!"

Mrs. Green gazed before her gloomily, and shook her head, as though no words could quite describe the picture she had in her mind's eye.

" Poor Harriet!" said I, involuntarily.

" Ah, pore soul," said Mrs. Green, with a groan. " She *were* plain! Still 'e could halways leave 'er at 'ome when 'e 'ad comp'ny, of course, an' she were a good cook. We may 'ope as 'ow 'Enry 'ad 'is reward."

At that instant a step was heard along the

passage outside. Mrs. Green started and glanced at me; then, with a countenance of dignified abstraction, she began thoughtfully to stone raisins.

" As I said afore," she remarked loudly, in tones of forbearing yet exhausted remonstrance, " I really 'ave n't no more time to was'e a-listenin' to you, Miss, kin' though you means it—which never shall I get these 'ere raisings done, as pore cook harsked me so special to finish, she bein' up to 'er cap in work, as it were, and that pleasant-tempered with it all, pore thing, though druv as never was."

The step approached the door. Mrs. Green stoned sternly yet wearily on, panting a little every now and again, as one worn with hours of patient labor. An industrious silence reigned in the room. The step passed the door and went on into the kitchen.

" Is she a-comin' ? " asked Mrs. Green, momentarily ceasing to stone.

"I think not," said I, listening breathlessly.

Mrs. Green paused, listened also, stoned more slowly, paused again, and ceased altogether.

"Elizabeth gettin' the tea!" she said, bitterly. "That 's the way them servingts halways does—a-goin' about the 'ouse in a manner ser sly an' secret, an' as tryin' to a person's nerves as never was. Which never 'ave I took to Elizabeth sence I seed 'er a-lookin' at 'erself in the dinin'-room lookin'-glass durin' prayers——"

Suddenly, without word or warning, the door opened behind us. Mrs. Green glanced hurriedly at me, and an expression of the utmost resignation instantly overspread her countenance.

"An' I really *mus'* harsk you to go now, Miss," she said loudly and wearily, without turning her head. "The las' thing I wishes to do bein' to delay pore cook, as 'ardly knows where to turn a-gettin' ready for them

teachers, an' likely to be 'ere any minute for the raisings, which, fur though it be from me for to seem himpolite, there 's limits to heven the strongest, an' stone raisings an' listen to you a-talkin' is more than I can well manidge, though mos' willin', if possible. Which if 'ere ain't pore cook 'erself, an' the raisings done as near as near, if not quite, through hunexpected delays!"

During the flood of explanations, commiserations, and ejaculations which instantly and simultaneously poured from Mrs. Green and cook, I departed apologizing, not so swiftly but that I overheard part of Mrs. Green's last remark.

"Which wore do you look, cook, an' no wonder, to say nothin' of 'ot, pore soul; but 'ardly my fault, though trewly grieved, me 'avin' tried constant for to get on with me work, as never could I do so with Miss Meary a——"

The rest was lost in the closing of the door.

IV

" CHEERFUL NOOS "

I SOUGHT Mrs. Green to impart to her a piece of family news. I discovered her turning out a top attic, breathing heavily—in a congenial atmosphere of steam and soft soap —upon her knees on a small island of dry board, which her furious efforts were momentarily decreasing.

" Mrs. Green," said I, loudly, " I 've got a piece of news to tell you."

Mrs. Green looked up with a tremendous start; then she sat weightily back upon her heels, and, carrying a hairy swab of flannel from the steaming floor to her steaming brow, wiped herself in a kind of passionate exhaustion.

"Never, Miss!" she said, politely, between the snorts induced by her late exertions.

"Yes, I have," said I. "Guess what it is."

Mrs. Green pondered.

"No one ain't a-dyin'?" she said, a gloomy hope lighting her eye.

"Goodness! no," I replied. "It 's cheerful news."

"Oh, *cheerful* noos!" said Mrs. Green, slowly. She relapsed into thought again. After a moment she murmured from the depths of her heavy reflections:

"Ah, cheerful noos don't come to call so easy."

"Why not?" said I.

"Not arter all I been through," said Mrs. Green, with a sigh. "Now hany other kind I could 'a' made a power o' shots at! There 's deaths an' diseasis an' hupsets o' hall kinds; but *cheerful* noos—". She shook her head and sighed again.

" Then I 'll tell you," said I. " Miss Mildred is going to be married."

Mrs. Green looked at the floor in dead silence. Then she thoughtfully examined the intricacies of the hairy swab in her sodden hand; finally, she slowly plunged it into her pail, and, returning from her heels to her knees, recommenced, in a dark abstraction, to wash inches off her island.

This was depressing.

" Don't you think that 's cheerful news ? " I asked.

Mrs. Green washed on a moment in silence. Then she said, in accents of unmitigated gloom:

" Well, Miss, if you harsks me, it 's noos as may be cheerful or it may not. There 's no sayin' yet awhile. The Bible tells us as 'ow we ain't to r'envy our neighbor's wife, we ain't to r'envy our neighbor's 'ouse, norris servingt, norris maid, norris s' ox, norris s' ass —till we knows 'ow 'e treats 'em."

"It 's not envy, it 's covet," said I, somewhat startled.

"What you covit, you r'envy," said Mrs. Green, with decision, "or you did in *my* young days"—which puzzled me so that after a moment of bewilderment I gave it up, and left Mrs. Green's new reading of the Commandments unchallenged.

"Well," said I, returning to our first subject, "Captain Swift is very nice, anyway."

"Nothin'," said Mrs. Green, suddenly sitting up and emphasizing her words with her hairy swab, "*nothin'* could 'a' promised better than my first! Six foot two, an' a face on 'im like a figger-r'ed — two good size rooms in Golding Lane an' sixteen an' six a week reglar when 'e brought it 'ome. An' what did it come to? Ah, uncerting things there is a many, but for sheer uncertingness of a desprit kind there 's nothin' beats a nusbing." She resumed her washing with a heavy groan.

"Well, but you 're very happy with Green, are n't you?" suggested I.

"Green 's 'appy with me, you mean," said Mrs. Green, gloomily. "An' so 'e ought. Ah, I studies 'im."

I gave that up, too, but before I could introduce another turn to the conversation Mrs. Green was struck by a new idea. She sat up and looked at me with interest.

"An' so Miss Mildred 's 'a' beat you, Miss," she said, thoughtfully. "Two years younger nor you, ain't she? Ah! two years makes a lot o' difference in looks, so it does. Well, we 've often wondered in the village how it would be."

"I do n't want to marry," said I.

"An' quite right, too, Miss," said Mrs. Green, approvingly. "Never want what you can't 'ave, an' then you 'll be 'appy."

"That 's not exactly it," I said, uncertainly.

"Near enough, I expec'," said Mrs. Green,

still lost in thought. I relapsed once more. Further explanations seemed superfluous.

"An' where 'll they live?" she asked, after a moment.

"In London, I think," said I.

"Ah! I know London," said Mrs. Green, with a snort. "Spent a 'ole day in it once, an' come away wishin' I 'd never gone."

"Why?" I asked.

"That ruinous," explained Mrs. Green, shortly.

Then, remembering her wrongs, sudden wrath flashed in her eyes. "*I* ain't the one to grudge a penny when I 'm out on a noliday," she said emphatically, "but the things they chargis, an' the pricis they harsks, is a scandal an' a shame, an' so I upped an' ses! *I* give it 'em! *I* was n't afraid; I expec' there 's been a change in *that* eatin'-'ouse hanyway, since *I* 'ad my say in it."

"What was it they charged you so highly for?" said I.

"Well, Miss," said Mrs. Green, "I sees a little eatin'-'ouse as I thinks would jus' suit, an' me bein' faint through 'avin' los' my way four times alonger perlicemen what never ought n't to have been perlicemen, they bein' fools, an' 'avin' walked six miles on a nempty stummick, hin I goes an' down I sets. Hup there come a young man in a napring what was n't white no more whatever it may 'ave been when 'e firs' dress 'isself. 'Meddim,' ses 'e, perlite like, 'what can I get cher?' ses 'e. 'I 'll take a negg to my tea, I thank you, young man,' ses I, for I felt to want a little somethin' solid in the hinside—'if so be you 'll let me know 'ow much it corstes,' ses I, for I was n't goin' to be 'ad by no young man, perlite or hunperlite, country or no country."

She stopped for breath, and damped the rising heat of her ire by vigorous dabs with the hairy swab on cheeks and brow.

"Presbiration," she explained. "But it ain't nothin' to the way it come a-startin'

when I discovered the dodges of that eatin'-'ouse.

"'What 'ill it corst?' ses I. 'B'iled?' ses 'e. 'Yes,' ses I. 'Thrippence,' ses 'e. Which heggs was a-corstin' a shillin' a dozen in the country, but town 'ens ain't so proffilic as country 'ens, I 've 'eard say. 'I 'll 'ave it,' ses I, heasy-like. But jus' as 'e was a-goin' orf I remembers as 'ow a b'iled hegg might ride a bit 'eavy on the hinside, me 'avin' still a long way to travil. Besides, ses I to myself, suppose they 'ard-boil it, ses I, my death it 'ill be, ses I, an' yet there ain't no sendin' back a negg what 's once been opened. Now a poached hegg, ses I to myself, you sees nakid before you, so to speak, ses I, an' if it ain't what it should be back it can go without no committin' of yourself in the way of a broken shell, ses I.

"So, quick as you please—'Hi,' I calls, an' back 'e come. 'On sekon thoughts I 'll 'ave it lightly poach, young man,' ses I, 'seein' as 'ow I 'm none too strong in the hinside.'

" Fourpence,' ses 'e. ' What ?' ses I, wery loud. ' Thrippence b'iled, fourpence poach,' ses 'e. ' *Ho*,' ses I, an' I felt the color a-risin'— ' *Ho*,' ses I—' but the same hegg, I suppose, sir ?' ses I. ' Ho, yes, the same hegg, meddim,' ses 'e, a-soothin' of me. Then I gets to me feet, an' I gathers me things, an' I looks 'im in the heye. ' Ho, yes, the same hegg, meddim,' ses I, sarcastic like, a-bowin' perlite —' as corsted *you* a penny 'apenny to start with at the mos',' ses I, a-gettin' hangrier an' hangrier as 'is meanness broke upon the min'. ' No,' ses I; ' chargis as is fair no woman never paid with a jyfuller smile nor what I 've done all my life,' ses I, ' but put upon is what I never was, no, nor never will be. Sence it 's the same hegg,' ses I, wery kind like, ' I suppose you 'as to charge hextry for a-shakin' of the pan, sir ?' ses I. Then 'e smile, an' that done for me. I was n't a-talkin' to give *'im* no pleasure, an' so I showed 'im. ' No, *thank* you,' I roars, wery loud an' wery sudden, an'

'e jump so, I knowed it give 'im the start I meant it to. 'I 'll see *you* poach firs', you young swindler,' ses I, and out I goes."

"Dear, dear," said I, sympathetically.

"'Dear, dear,' it was," said Mrs. Green forcibly, dabbing at her face, "an' if Miss Mildred goes to live in London, you mark my words, an' she the scatter-brain she his, we 'll 'ave 'er an' 'er capting, an' Lord knows ow many little captings all a-comin' 'ome on us through the bank by sea courts afore the year is hout."

"Do you mean the bankruptcy courts, Mrs. Green?" I asked, after a moment's thought.

"I means them courts what ses you need n't pay your debts unless you wants to," said Mrs. Green, meaningly, "which it seems to me no London folks could get along without 'em, if *that 's* the way they 're swindled."

It took her some time to reduce her excitement. She returned violently to her washing,

and I left her repeating, with low groans of bitter contempt, "*Ho*, yes, meddim, the same hegg, ses 'e, thrippence b'iled, an' fourpence poach."

V

" TRAVELLIN' AS *IS* TRAVELLIN' "

" ARE you fond of travelling, Mrs. Green ? " I asked, leaning thoughtfully against the water-butt.

I had come across Mrs. Green in a conducive hour, and we had entered into conversation. She was seated on the lowest step of the stair leading to her rooms above the coach-house. Her work was over, and her sleeves were unrolled; she was in a meditative mood. Together we contemplated the pickings and scratchings of the reflective hens about her doorway.

" Travellin' as *is* travellin'," she replied, " I enjys. As much as I enjys hanythink."

" What do you call travelling ? " said I.

"Put me in a third-class kerridge railway train," said Mrs. Green, sentimentally, "with hall me frens about me, an' nappy 'earts a-beatin' 'igh, an' nevery soul a-standin' treat cheerful, an' a-larfin' gay, an' no one a-carin' where they 're a-goin', nor whether they never gets there, an' I harsks no more! That 's what *I* calls travellin'. Suffer I may, for suffer I halways mus', along o' my firs'; but I suffers in silence with a smilin' heye."

"What is the other kind of travelling?" said I.

"When you travels cos you 'ave ter, an' not alonger wantin' to," replied Mrs. Green, shortly; "a 'urryin' 'ere an' a 'urryin' there, an' a-knockin' up constant again' a lot o' hidjets as carn' give a plain hanswer to a plain question, nor never could."

"And don't you suffer in silence in that kind of travelling?" said I, meditatively.

"I do not," said Mrs. Green. "I lets 'em know it."

A short pause ensued.

"There was the day I went to London," resumed Mrs. Green, thoughtfully, "as you 've 'eard me tell on. No one guesses what I went through that day, nor no one never will, 'cept 'Eving, as sen's the sorrers we hinjor."

"You only told me a little about it," said I.

"Ah! there 's things as ain't to be tol' in words," said Mrs. Green, darkly. "Eleving parcils I 'ad, an' neither more nor less an' that begun it. No comp'ny shell go a-chargin *me* for leggidge, ses I. Three an' heightpence it corstes me to get to London, ses I, an' I makes no complaint, for I travils 'eavy. But leggidge as goes inside a wan what no one wants to travil in—no, not ef you 'ired 'em to do it, ses I—they ain't no right to go a-chargin' again' a respectable person a-settin' in a paid-for seat. Nor *shell* they do so, ses I, determined-like, if I can stop 'em! So I ses to Green a Frid'y—me bein' promised to me harnt's nephew-be-marridge a Satterd'y—

' Green,' ses I, ' you 'll 'elp me do hup me things in parcils,' ses I, ' an' I 'll 'ang 'em about meself,' ses I. An' so I did."

" It was a very clever idea," I said.

" *Clever !* " said Mrs. Green, with a furious snort. " When you sups with Sating you wants a long spoon, an' so I tell you. No one never got the better of a comp'ny yet, nor never will. A single man with a face to 'im hanyone can manidge, but a lot o' cowards a-keepin' dark an' never bein' on the spot for to 'ear the trewth about theirselves, there ain't no reachin'. Which the thought on it drives me wil'."

She paused, and fanned herself with her apron in exasperation.

" There was a young man at the station what called 'isself a porter, an' when I come in, a bit blown with the hextry weight, hup 'e comes a-ready an' a-smilin' in a manner fit to bust a body along o' aggrawation. ' Put 'em hall there,' ses 'e, an' 'e points to the weigh

stand. Ah, I could 'a' '*it* 'im! 'Preps you 'd like me to get hon too,' ses I, a-pantin' fierce, for I sees immejit 'ow it would be. 'Not hunless you 'll pay for demigis, mem,' ses 'e, a-thinkin' 'isself funny. But no one ain't never funny with *me* long. 'Hif *I* gets hon, *you* 'll come too, any'ow,' ses I, an' I seizes 'im rown' the wais', an' afore 'e knowed where 'e were up 'e goes, as pale as a piller-slip; for 'e were a little man. That done me good."

She sighed, and fanned herself more gently, as one soothed by a pleasing reminiscence.

"Did n't the people laugh?" I asked.

"They did n't laugh at *me* no more," said Mrs. Green, darkly, "an' no more did n't 'e. But I 'ad to pay! Four an' sixpence, if you 'll believe me. More nor what I corst meself, an' me a good fourteen stun. It turns me in me bed o' nights to think of it. Ah, there 's thoughts as takes years an' years horf of a woman's life; but a man, 'e sets an' ses nothin', let 'im be cheated 'ow 'e may, so long as it 's a comp'ny

as does it. What 'e can't set straight heasy 'e 'll leave crooked. ' Don' let 's 'ave no fuss,' ses 'e, a-smilin' comfrerble. Ah! I knows 'em. But wimming ain't made that way. It torments 'em to be cheated.

" If I could honly get a good slap at that there South Heastern Comp'ny's face," she added with sudden fury, " I should n't min' so much. But it ain't to be done."

She relapsed into gloom.

" A comp'ny ain't got no face. They takes good care o' that. Four an' sixpence for me parcils, an' three an' heightpence for meself, an' me fourteen stun."

She groaned in bitterness of spirit, and, seizing a handy stone, flung it among the encroaching fowls, which scattered with protesting shrieks and elongated necks and swiftly-striding legs.

" But how was it you had so many parcels if you were only going for the day ? " said I, when the clamor had subsided.

"Presingts," said Mrs. Green. "Wegebuls, heggs, hunnions, hepples, an' sech like. Halso cast-orfs, for to make down for me harnt's nephew's children. An' a set o' chipped chiney tea-things as I 'ad n't no use for. An' a few other little things. To say nothin' of a nole bonnit for me harnt's nephew's wife, she bein' near 'er twelth, an' nothin' decent to rejoice in."

"Rejoice in!" I repeated.

"In church," explained Mrs. Green, "arterwards. A-giving of thanks for the goodness of 'Eving. Which she does 'em by threes, it comin' too dear to rejoice on 'em singly."

"Oh," I said.

Silence fell again.

"Yes, that begun it," said Mrs. Green, with a sigh. "An' 'avin' thus begun, thus it went on. Heverythink went wrong. I tole you what 'appened in the eatin'-'ouse. Ah, when I got 'ome a Satterd'y night, Green 'e nearly wep' to see me. 'Oh, 'Anna, 'Anna,' ses 'e

with 'is feelin' 'eart, ' you 're wore to a presbirin' shadder.' Which I were."

" You did n't like London, did you?" said I.

" *Like* it," repeated Mrs. Green, with a contemptuous sniff. " Oo 'd like a dirty hendless 'owlin' place like that? Heveryone a-doin' heverythink at once, an' a-gettin' that muddled over it you could 'a' cried to see the mess they was in. I takes it as even the folks as lives there honly stops becos they mus'. An' the names they give it, too, a-tryin' to make the best o' things, pore souls—so 'igh soundin'. You wonders they 'as the face to say 'em to a strynger! ' Marble Harch,' ses they, an 'it as black an' grimy as coal. ' Precious little marble,' ses I scornful; ' 'ow many years sence they give it its last coat o' whitewash?' ses I. An' the bus-'opper, 'e larf."

" The *what?* " said I.

" The bus-'opper," said Mrs. Green, shortly. " Which 'e said 'is name was conducter, but I knowed better, an' so I told 'im. ' The man

as drives the 'bus is the man as conduc's it,' ses I, 'jus' as the parson as 'ums the prayers is the man as conduc's the congregation,' ses I. '*You* 're no more the conducter o' this 'bus than the man as opings the doors of the church is the parson 'isself,' ses I. 'E larf again, but 'e did n't contradict me, cos 'e could n't, me bein' right."

"But why did you call him 'bus-hopper?" I asked.

"I did n't," replied Mrs. Green; "'e called it 'isself. But it was 'is name right enough. 'E made me downright giddy the way 'e went a-'oppin' hin an' hout. I ses to 'im at las', ses I, 'If your mother could see you, young man,' ses I, 'she 'd die o' fright,' ses I. 'For 'Eving's sake stop horf or hon,' ses I, 'for you 'll break your neck as sure as fate if you goes a-temptin' Providence with the step so near the wheels.' But 'e honly larf again, 'e bein' a nappy-'earted young man. So seein' 'im so keerless-like, an' me a-thinkin' of 'is

pore mother, I gets near the door, an' when 'e nex' 'ops on I clutches 'im safe an' gives 'im a good pull. 'Come hinside an' *set*,' ses I, firm-like. Never did I see a young man larf like 'e did! 'E 'ad a nigh voice like a woman, an' 'e larf till 'e cried. 'You 're like a grass-'opper,' ses I, 'with your 'igh voice an' your jumpin' legs.' 'I 'm a 'bus-'opper,' ses 'e, a-larfin' more, an' 'e spoke trewth. A 'bus-'opper 'e was. They was *hall* 'bus-'oppers as fur as I could see, a-skippin' hon an' horf their 'busses till you shook to see 'em."

"Did you like riding on a 'bus, Mrs. Green?" I asked.

"No," said Mrs. Green, with decision, "I did n't. 'Cept for the 'bus-'opper, as was a kin' young man, if silly, there was n't nothin' to like about it. They ain't like the 'busses as used to run in Yarmouth in *my* young days. When firs' I step hin, keerful-like, the 'bus-'opper, 'e ses, ses 'e, 'Hinside or hout?' ses 'e. 'If I 'd 'a' wanted to stop houtside I

should n't 'a' got hin, stoopid,' ses I, short. 'Oh, hall right,' ses 'e, 'but I thought you might like the fresh hair,' ses 'e. An' then I sees that there shockin' little flight o' steps, as steep as a ladder, a-windin' to the roof. 'Take shame to yourself, young man,' ses I, stern-like, an' I walks hinside an' sets down, there bein' no one helse there. The nex' momingt down there trundles a lot o' people's legs from the ceilin'! Never did I see sech a sight. Firs' come their bewts, then their hankles, then their——"

"Yes, I know," said I; "it must have greatly surprised you."

"*Surprised* me?" said Mrs. Green, solemnly; "it done a lot more than *that*, as you 'll guess when you 'ear what 'appened. If you 'll believe me, arter three pair o' male legs, as was startlin' enough, down there come a pair o' female. Firs' I see a pair of button shoes—female hunmistakable. I jump so I drop three parcil! '*Never!*' ses I to meself,

a-gaspin'; but down they come, an' a female she was sure enough, a-leavin' 'alf 'er skirts a-top, an' a-lowerin' 'er feet as bold as brass, an' they in a pair o' stockin's that thin——"

"I know," I said; "it is a strange custom."

"But she 'eard the trewth for *once* in 'er life," said Mrs. Green, strongly. "*She* won't never do it no more! I was a-waitin' for 'er, an' when she got to the bottom, hout I looks, an' I ses, ses I, 'An' suppose there 'd been a man hinside,' ses I, loud an' firm, 'a-watchin' you come down,' ses I, 'where 'd a-you bin' *then*, Miss?' ses I. "Ah, you may well red up,' ses I. 'You go 'ome,' ses I, 'an' the nex' time you come a-ridin', you ride hinside as a young woman should,' ses I, 'an' keep your hankles hunder your skirts as were give you to 'ide 'em.'"

"What on earth did she say?" said I, with an involuntary gasp.

"She 'ad n't no time to say nothin'," said Mrs. Green, with dignity, "for the 'bus went hon, an' left 'er a-standin' strook."

VI

"A WARNIN' TO THE YOUNG"

"DID anything else interesting happen while you were in that 'bus?" I asked Mrs. Green the next time we found ourselves in conversation together.

"Honly a man as was drunk," replied Mrs. Green, thoughtfully. "Pleasant drunk, so to speak. Quite 'armless. A nice feller sober, I should say."

"What did *he* do?" I inquired.

"Nothin'," said Mrs. Green, still lost in thought. "'T was what 'e said. 'E come along a-singin' an' a-wavin' of 'is 'angkerchif, an' the 'bus-'opper 'e stop the 'bus an' 'elped 'im up, an' there 'e stood a-'oldin' on an'

a-swayin' an' a-smilin', mos' 'appy. 'Any roo' houtshi?' ses 'e. 'No, there ain't,' ses the 'bus-'opper, for 'e see as 'ow 'e could n't never get hup that there little ladder. 'Then I 'll come *hin*shi,' ses 'e, a-smilin' more, 'an' sit alonger me beauty, me butterfly,' ses 'e, an' 'e come in an' set down by me side, me wearin' me blew velvet an' me brown bewts."

"Were n't you angry?" said I.

"Hangry I was not," replied Mrs. Green, weightily; "which no more will you be, Miss, when you 're as use' to 'em as I am. Many 's the time I thinks to meself, a-comin' acrost it in them little trac's, ah, thinks I, King Solomon knowed what it was to be drunk, thinks I, when 'e advise' church-people to give a sorf' hanswer to them as is heasy made wrath. Never rouse 'em, Miss, an' thank 'Eving 'earty if they don' rouse theirselves."

"I 'll try to remember," I replied.

"Hall I ses to 'im was," went on Mrs. Green, "'there 's room for the two on us,' ses

I, a-smilin' kind. 'E smile back, an' so we set. Arter a while 'e come closer, so I moved meself to the hother side, still a-smilin' steady. But it went to 'is 'eart bitter. 'I 'm quite 'armlish,' ses 'e, a-weepin'. 'I knows you har,' ses I, a-soothin' of 'im; which 'armless 'e were, but 'ot, it bein' a warm day. Ah, *I* knowed 'ow to manidge the pore chap, which was more than could be said for them others as come hin presingtly."

"What did they do?" said I.

"Firs' there come a lot o' wimming," said Mrs. Green, contemptuously, "as noticed nothin' wrong, an 'set theirselves keerless on the same side as 'im. Precious soon they hall come a-skippin' hover, some a-lookin' shock' an' some a-lookin' scare', an' a-murmurin' sech sayin's as 'Disgoostin', disgoostin',' which was the very thing to set 'im a-rampagin,' 'e bein' as 'e was."

"How foolish," said I.

"Foolish it were," said Mrs. Green, "an'

so I tole 'em. ' You keep quiet an' 'e 'll keep quiet,' ses I. ' It 's plain as *you* 'ave n't 'ad no dealin's with drunkards,' ses I, contemptuous-like, ' or you would n't hact so stoopid,' ses I. So there we hall set, twelve on us a-packed tight along one side, an' 'e a-smilin' lonesome on the hother. Presingtly one old lady as was a-stiflin' calls out. ' Conducter, conducter,' calls she, a-knowin' no better; ' conducter,' ses she, ' can't you turn this tipsy man hout ? ' ses she. ' 'E ain't a-doin' you no 'arm, mem,' ses the 'bus-'opper; which no more 'e was n't, an' a shame it was to treat 'im so, an' 'e a-weepin' to 'ear 'er."

" But he ought n't to have been drunk," said I.

" If we hall on us never did nothin' but what we hought, Miss," said Mrs. Green, with deep dignity, " where 'd you go for a warnin' to the young ? "

I found no answer to this question, and Mrs. Green proceeded:

" Presingtly hin there come a thin parson, an' 'e set 'isself down by the man, there bein' no room for 'im to do hotherwise. 'E was a-wearin' of one of them seamless wests up to 'is collar an' down to 'is legs, a-made like Semuel in the Bible's, honly hall black."

Mrs. Green paused.

" I halways thinks," she added, thoughtfully, " 'ow much better they 'd look if they put a bit o' color about theirselves, like 'e did, or 'is mother for 'im, wimming always 'aving the bes' tas'e, to be sure."

It took me a moment to disentangle this sentence.

" It was Joseph's coat that had the color," said I, doubtfully.

" Then let 'em foller Joseph," said Mrs. Green, firmly, " as was a wirtuous young man enough, an' not go about a-lookin' like rooks, when Gawd 's made the worl' as good as a flower-garding. 'Owever, down 'e set, as solemn as hanythink, an' when 'e sees on a

sudding 'ow things was, 'e fixes 'is heyes hout o' winder, an' 'e sets an' stares as tight an' as stiff as a stature, a-turnin' red an' a turnin' white, but a-takin' no notice o' nothin'.

"Which it were enough to aggrawate a saint," added Mrs. Green, in a burst of irritation, "let alone a man as 'ad 'ad a drop too much."

"Did he get angry?" I inquired.

"Well might 'e 'a' done so," said Mrs. Green; "but 'is 'eart was kin'! When 'e foun' 'as 'ow the parson would n't smile at 'im, 'e growed sad-'earted, but 'e never grumble. 'Ah!' ses 'e, 'I 'm 'armlish ef I 'm pore,' ses 'e; 'but never minsh,' ses 'e, 'up in 'Evingsh we 'll be hall alike,' ses 'e, mournful —not so clear-like, of course, but so 's we hall hunderstood. The parson, 'e sit a-gazin' hout o' winder, an' a-tightenin' of 'is pale face, an' a-takin' no notice. So the man, 'e shif's along the seat till 'e reaches 'im—which it took 'im a long time—an' 'e takes 'im kind by the

harm, an' then 'e looks at hus a-settin' hopposite, an' 'e shakes 'is 'ead solemn. 'Thin,' ses 'e. 'Crooil, crooil thin,' ses 'e, 'pore chap,' ses 'e, an' 'e wep' for pity. 'You come along o' me, pore begger!' ses 'e to the parson, a-clappin' of 'im sudding hon the back, 'an' I 'll fin' you a good livin',' ses 'e. An' I felt that touched that I looks at the ceilin', an' I ses, 'Ah,' ses I, 'there 's sinners as sets examples to saints,' ses I, 'black wests or no black wests,' ses I."

"What did the parson do?" I asked.

"'Urried hout, a-growin' red," said Mrs. Green, with meditative satisfaction, "an' a-feelin' of 'is fault. An' there 's the sekon' gong a-ringin', Miss, which you 'll be late if you don' go."

VII

"CANWASSERS"

"TIMES," said Mrs. Green, on my meeting her in the orchard to-day, "is stirrin'."

She put her pails of pig-wash firmly on the ground, and surveyed me gloomily. She was extremely flushed in the face, as one recently emerged from severe combat.

"What has been happening, Mrs. Green?" I asked, soothingly.

Mrs. Green refused to be soothed; she abated no jot of her eye's dark ire.

"Nothin'," she replied, shortly. "Nor nothin' ain't goin' to 'apping. It 's the stoppin' of it 'appening as tries me."

She raised her voice suddenly in a startling

roar, at the same time lifting her eyes to the sky, in the manner of a tenor evolving a top note.

"Green!" she shouted. "Green! Where *har* you?"

"'Ere," came a muffled reply from over the adjacent kitchen-garden wall, where, to judge from the sound, Green was busy burying his head in something soft.

"An' you stop there," screamed Mrs. Green, still gazing skywards, "or you 'll know it."

She lowered her eyes, and looked at me with solemn triumph.

"Why, Mrs. Green," said I, "what is happening to Green?"

"Thanks ter me," replied Mrs. Green, with dignity, "nothin' is a-'appening to Green. Green 's in the kitching garding a-diggin' of pertaters, where 'e 'll stop till I takes 'im for to vote. I shouts to 'im from time to time as I goes about me work, an' then I knows 'e 's

safe. The sly ways of them canwassers, male *an'* female, is that astonishin' as they 'll fly horf with a woman's 'usbing as soon as look at 'im. But they don't catch Green while *Hi*'m about!"

"I should think not," said I, sympathetically.

"But it 'll be the death of me," said Mrs. Green, with a heavy sigh. "Twice 'ave I tore Green from a runnin' motor-car as 'e 'd been put in unbeknownst to me, an' 'e a-settin' there that pale through not bein' accustom' to the noise an' the shiverin'."

"But why did he go?" said I.

"Well may you harsk," replied Mrs. Green, gloomily. "'E went along of 'is feelin' 'eart. Carn't never say 'No' to nobody if they honly harsks 'im kin'.

"Wimming as come a-smilin'," she added, with rising ire, "I can deal with. Halso men —a-smilin' or not a-smilin'—I makes short work on. But when it comes to motor-cars— a-gaspin' along like ser many nightmares, an'

a-goin' that fas' you ain't 'ad time to think on 'em afore they 're gone——"

She paused, lost in wrathful ponderings.

"Have you had any here?" I asked.

"'Ave I 'ad any 'ere!" repeated Mrs. Green, witheringly. "*'Ave I 'ad any 'ere!* I lay to believe I *'ave.* 'Ad 'em since hearly mornin': the firs' one come at height o'clock. Painted mustid-color it were, hor I *should* say kharkee, an' 'ung aroun' with textes an' motters, an' a large board in front with 'Vote for Himperialism an' Harmy reform,' writ large in red. Hanythink more startlin' an' more hunfittin' for a reg'lar churchman like Green to go a-rushin' about 'is native village a-votin' in, an' 'e ser well known as 'e is, I never see, no nor never wants to. To say nothink of the rattlin' an' throbbin' bein' enough to ruin a person's innards to 'is dyin' day! 'Come an' up'old the Hempire,' ses the little man as travelled in it, an' 'e 'ops out fren'ly, a-smilin' mos' kin'.

" ' You leave Green be,' ses I, loud an' firm out of me winder, which fallin' on 'im hunexpected, as it were, from above, 'e jump, an' turns 'is eyes up sudding to the sky. ' Green 'll want more up'oldin' than the Hempire by a long way,' ses I, ' if you takes 'im in that there shiverin' cirkis,' ses I, ' which you ain't a-goin' for to do. Be ashamed on yourself,' ses I, severe, ' a-temptin' Providence with hoil and what not,' ses I, ' an' despigin' the 'orses as Gawd made for to draw carts,' ses I, ' an' a-blowin' up in sudding judgmints again an' again, as serves you right. *I* knows Green's constitooshun,' ses I to 'im, ' an' ought ter, seein' as 'ow I studies it year hin, year hout, an' no one sha' n't start hupsettin' it,' ses I, firm, ' not if the Hempire 's a-'owlin' for Green to come for to 'old it up,' ses I, ' which if it is, let it fall,' ses I, ' it bein' too weak for to be worth takin' care on,' ses I."

Mrs. Green paused for breath.

" What did he say to that ? " I asked.

"Oh, 'e takes orf 'is 'at *mos'* perlite," said Mrs. Green, bowing deeply as she spoke. "An' 'e ses, 'I don' doubt as you 're a hexellent wife, meddim,' ses 'e, sorf; 'but I 'eard as you was Conservatives, meddim,' ses 'e, 'an' this 'ere 's a Conservative car as 'ill save your good 'usbing the trouble of walkin' to the pollin' booths,' ses 'e.

"'Thank you, sir,' ses I, a-bowin' back, 'you 're mos' kin',' ses I, 'but me good 'usbing 'e 'll walk to the pollin' booths with me a deal better nor 'e 'll travil there with you,' ses I, 'arrivin' hupside down if 'e ever arrove at all, which it 's mos' likely 'e never would do, along of you hall a-blowin' up 'alf-way,' ses I."

Again Mrs. Green paused to breathe.

"And what happened?" said I.

"Me kettle boiled over," replied Mrs. Green, "an' 'ardly 'ad I turn' me back for to see to it, afore I 'ears a rattle an' a squeal from that there hoil-car, an' there was it a-startin',

an' Green a-settin' in it a-'oldin' on as pale as pale, an' the little man a-smilin'."

"What *did* you do?" said I.

"I puts me 'ead out o' winder," replied Mrs. Green, thoughtfully, "an' I roars 'GREEN,' sudding. There was n't no need to say nothin' more, they hall bein' that startle' the driver 'e stops the car, an' Green 'e rushes hout, an' it goes away quicker nor it came."

"But Green *is* Conservative, is n't he?" I asked.

"'E is," said Mrs. Green, confidentially. "At least I thinks 'e is. I ain't halways ser sure. No one could lay to be quite sure, an' things as muddle' as they har. But as fur as I kin make out from the evenin' paper as I reads constant, Green 's Conservative. It don't hallways seems quite certing what it is itself," she added, meditatively, "but that 's politicks."

We both remained lost in thought for a short time.

"Well," resumed Mrs. Green, "I 'm

blessed if there did n't come another car 'alf a nour afterwards, *halso* painted mustid-color, or I *should* say kharkee, with 'ole speeches hung aroun' it. China an' cotton an' coal, an' the 'ousin' on the pore, an' I don' know what all, an' a big board with ' Vote for Himpearial Librulhism an' Tommy Hatkins well-harmed,' which, when you come to think on it, was no more nor less nor what the hother 'ad."

She paused and sighed heavily.

" Many 's the eleckshin I 've see," she said, gloomily, " but never one in sech a muddle as this seems for to be. It strikes me as the bes' thing they could do would be for to sen' their photos aroun' with a kin' messidge sayin' as 'ow hevery one was to vote for the one they thought the bes' lookin', there bein' no difference in 'em hotherwise. Which no more there ain't, or so the Libruls ses.

" What puzzles *me* his," she added, darkly, " that two weeks ago there was plenty of differences; they was all a-'owlin' on 'em hat

each hother. Now there ain't none! Where has they hall goned to ?—that 's what I can't think. The Conservative 'e comes along 'ere an' 'e ses, ' I 'm a Nimpearialist,' ses 'e, ' an' a staunch patrot,' ses 'e, ' an' I wants this, that, an' the hother done,' ses 'e. ' Right you har,' ses I, ' so does Green.' Two minutes arter along there comes a Radical. ' I 'm a Librul Limpearialist,' ses 'e, ' an' a faithful patrot,' ses 'e, ' an I wants this, that, and the hother done,' ses 'e. An' I 'm blessed if it ain't jus' the same as the Conservative."

" Then what do you say to the Liberal ?" said I, thoughtfully.

" I ses," replied Mrs. Green, emphatically, " ' you wants it too late, me man,' ses I. ' You should 'a' spoke of it sooner,' ses I. ' Parlyment would 'a' been a good place for to say it in,' ses I, ' where the hothers did,' ses I. ' Besides,' ses I, ' it 's safer on the face of it,' ses I, me speakin' for Green, as thinks with me in sech things, ' for to let them stop hin as

'as made their mistakes,' ses I, 'an' sees 'em. You need n't tell me as 'ow you won't make the same mistakes,' ses I. 'I knows you won't,' ses I. 'You 'll make new ones, an' probbubly worse.'"

She stopped and wiped her brow.

"Still it 's puzzlin' to a body," she added, relapsing into gloom.

"It 's just the different meanings with which they use the terms that no one sees," said I, meditatively.

"Bless you," said Mrs. Green, "that 's heasy enough. I 've 'ad that hall explain' to me. Himpearialist means what we takes we 'll 'elp each hother keep, an' Patrot means 'Hi 'm for Hinglan', right or wrong, agains' the 'ole blessid world!' Which so we ought hall for ter be."

"So we ought," said I.

"An' that remin's me—" said Mrs. Green.

Once more she raised her eyes and voice,

expending much of the warmth of her feelings in the fury of her roar.

"Green!" she shrieked. "Green! Where *har* you?"

But there came no answering yell from the potato patch.

Mrs. Green turned pale, lowering her eyes with a glazed glare of wrath. "They 've got 'im," she said, with awful conviction. "Now, which on 'em is it?"

She swooped down upon her pails and was gone.

VIII

" POLITICKS "

WE were well into the turmoil of the election when next I met Mrs. Green. She was standing outside her door with her arms folded, surveying the landscape with an air of portentous abstraction. She gave me a short, dark greeting, as beseemed one occupied with foreboding meditations, and relapsed ostentatiously into gloom.

" It 's a lovely evening," I observed.

" For them as 'as the 'eart to enjoy it," said Mrs. Green, tersely, " it may be. For them as is wearin' to a hearly grave, as it were, all evenin's is alike."

I changed the conversation

"Did you manage to rescue Green that time?" I asked, mildly.

"Them as I sets out for to resky," said Mrs. Green, shortly, "I reskies."

"I am sure you do," said I, thoughtfully.

"No one can't be sure on nothin'," replied Mrs. Green, emphatically, "in this 'ere worl' of sudden snatchin's up an' settin's down."

"Well, but I meant that I should be glad to have you with me in any danger," I explained.

Mrs. Green visibly softened. She struggled against her weakness. Then she yielded with a heavy sigh.

"Ah!" she said, smiling mournfully. "So you ses, Miss, an' fur be it from me for to contradick you. But there 's dangers aroun' jus' now, an' pitfalls an' hupsets, as no one can't get the better on, me bein' that wore out with a-guardin' of Green an' a-strugglin' with canwassers as never was. No, what the country's a-comin' to 'Eving only knows, as can make men to be of one min' in a nouse, but never

does so, for reasons bes' known to itself. As I ses to Mrs. Black las' night, she bein' that distractid through 'avin' 'ad fifteen canwassers at 'er that day, all a-promisin' for to make their Parlymints sell coal to the pore at fifteen shillin's the ton—which is what she sets store on, pore thing, as never knowed no politicks nor never will—' Ah! ' ses I, ' you may well be put about, Mrs. Black,' ses I. ' We 're at the mercy of Providence,' ses I, ' an' we may jus' make up our min's to so bein',' ses I, ' an' expec' the wors'.' "

" She must have been very puzzled," I said.

" *Puzzled*," echoed Mrs. Green. " Puzzled ain't no word for it; they all a-promisin for to do the same, an' she bein' in sech terror of 'er 'usbing a-puttin' in the wrong Parlymint arter all, an' a-findin', when they comes for to set, as coal is still one poun' twelve shillin's an' sixpence the ton, an' it too late for to put in the other.

" Pore soul," added Mrs. Green, with

condescending pity, "there 's other things as puzzled 'er too, she knowin' ser little of politicks. 'Mrs. Green,' ses she to me the hother day, 'you 're a neddicated woman,' ses she, 'as reads the papers constant,' says she, 'an' knows politicks through an' through', ses she. 'Can *you* tell me,' ses she to me, 'why they keeps a-narskin' of us for to sen' 'em in at the top of the pole?' ses she. 'In 'Eving's name, what pole may it be?' ses she, 'an' where 's the use of settin' on the top of it?—which Mr. Smith 'e never could do,' ses she, 'e bein' that stout.' 'Bless you,' ses I, kin' like, a-'idin' of a larf as would 'a' 'urt 'er feelin's. 'Never 'ave I see sech hignrance,' ses I. 'It ain't a stick, me good woman,' ses I, 'it 's a—it 's a—it 's a—it ain't a stick,' ses I."

She glanced at me with dignity.

"Of course it is n't," I replied. "But, Mrs. Green, I had no idea you were such a politician."

" Ho, yes. I know somethin' about politicks," said Mrs. Green, with an important sigh. " I lived with a lady as learned all 'er servingts politicks. Fair horf 'er 'ead she was, 'cause she 'ad n't got no vote—set in 'er 'ouse an' draw'd up bread through the winders rather than pay 'er rates an' taxis. Mos' uncomfrerble, I called it, but she said it was a protes'. She give us leckchers on politicks—a-settin' on the kitching table—as I 've never forgot, nor never shall, me bein' young hat the time, an' heasy scare'. All as 'ow nothin' was n't right, nor never would be."

She sighed again.

" And what happened in the end ? " said I.

" She got hill through settin' too long hindoors," replied Mrs. Green. " So she smuggles of 'erself out careful at the back an' takes a walk unbeknownst, the crowd an' the perleecemen an' the bailiffs all a-settin' in the front garding, a-watchin' of the winders an'

a-laughin', an' a-thinkin' of 'er still hinside. 'Don' yer let no one hin,' ses she, stern, 'not if you vallys *my* service,' ses she, 'for hout of this you 'll hall on you pack,' ses she, 'if you lets hany one get ser much as their nose hinside.' So we locks the door arter 'er, an' goes hupstairs for to watch the crowd, as yells 'appy at us, a-thinkin' we was 'ungry. Presingtly we 'ears some one a-thunderin' at the back door, an' down we rushes. 'It 's a telegram,' ses the man houtside. 'Mos' himportant. Battle, murder, an' sudding death hin the fam'ly,' shouts 'e, 'as your missus mus' know on *hat* onst.' Well, we looks at heach hother, for what to do we did *not* know. 'Let 'im go,' ses I; 'hanyways, Missus ain't in,' ses I, 'an' what 's more,' ses I, 'I don' believe 'im,' ses I, it never bein' my way for to believe no one as I can 'elp. But me bein' young at the time, no one took much notice on me, an' the cook she ses sollum as 'ow a telegram was a mos' serious matter, as mus'

be took hin, ses she, or worse might apping, ses she. So we opings the door jus' a crack, as you might say—hall three on us a-'oldin' of it desprit for to slam it if hany one give a shove at it, an' sure enough a telegram come through at the top crack, but a boot come through at the bottom, an' we was done for."

" Why ? " said I.

" Let a bailiff get ser much as 'is big toe acrost the doorway," said Mrs. Green, forcibly, " an' hin 'e mus' come, for it 's contemp' of the Queen an' 'er Court as you can be put in prising for. You remember that, Miss, again' the time when your hown trouble comes. Lor', what a set-out there was when Missus come 'ome! Never 'ave I seen a man so scare' as that bailiff. But she did n't pay 'er rates an' taxis, not she! They took a drooring-room table, an' paid theirselves. Ah, she was a fine, upstandin', 'igh-spiritid lady as I was sorry to leave. But kitching service never done for me," added Mrs. Green, thoughtfully, " along

o' cooks' tempers bein' that uncerting, an' me hown a little 'ot. So I lef' service."

"Was the telegram important?" I asked.

"Bless you, no," said Mrs. Green, forcibly. "In course it were n't. That was their little trick, an' I knowed it. 'Owever, that 's where I firs' 'ad politicks learned me, an' me 'avin' kep' 'em hup ever sence, I knows somethin' about it.

"More nor what Green does," she added, plunging into deep meditation. "Green gets 'orrible 'eadaches when 'e goes out for to discuss politicks in the village. 'E never 'ad no 'ead for long words. 'E comes back that muddle', poor little chap, to say nothin' of 'is goin' reg'lar with the one as comes firs', bless 'is feelin' 'eart, along o' not bein' able for to disap'int 'em when they harsks 'im so hearnis', an' a-treats 'im so gen'rous hout of their own pockits — which they *ses* it 's their hown pockits, but I 'as my doubts! 'Owever, they don't catch *me* so heasy, an' Green 'e votes as

I votes, 'ooever 'e drinks with. There come a Librul along a day or two back. ' Vote for hour party,' ses 'e, 'appy. ' Bless you,' ses I, ' you ain't got none, me speakin' for Green as thinks with me,' ses I. Which no more they 'ave n't."

" What did he say ? " I asked.

" 'E was took aback," replied Mrs. Green. " 'E were a little man, pale in the face natshrul. But arter a bit, 'e began for to heggsplain as 'ow they *'ad* got a party. ' Well, I 'm sure I 'm please' to 'ear it,' ses I kin', ' an' may you keep it a nice long time,' ses I, ' an' not lose it ser quick as you foun' it,' ses I, ' which 'ud be a pity arter hall the surprise an' hexcitement as you mus' 'ave felt about it,' ses I.

" Me speakin' fer Green, as thinks with me in sech matters," she added, solemnly.

" Of course," said I.

There was a pause.

" Ah, yes," resumed Mrs. Green with a sigh, " they 're heasy deal' with as a rule, an' when

they don' come in hoil-cars I generally talks to 'em sensible, Librul *hor* Conservative, there bein' no reason why I should n't, they showin' theirselves horften mos' mistook, an' a-needin' of advice. There was one young woman as come a-canwassin' 'ere as got a settin' right she 'ad n't bargained for. She hupset me from the firs', I will hadmit, she bein' the seventh that day, an' 'avin' a smile on 'er as she mus' 'ave practise' constant for years—for hall the worl' like a person as 'd been makin' a face when the clock struck, an' could n't never set theirselves straight again. 'An' 'oo may *you* be a-canwassin' for?' ses I. 'Ave you a nusbing or a brother or a father a-settin' for Parlyment,' ses I, 'that you come a-harskin' for Green's vote?' ses I. 'No,' ses she, 'I ain't nothin' but a country,' ses she, a-smilin' more at bein' ser smart. 'Which thinks ser little of you,' ses I, short, 'that it gives a vote to a laborer in a lodgin'-'ouse a-hearnin' of 'alf a crown a week,' ses I, 'an' leaves you with-

out. Ah,' ses I, ' you need my ole mistress arter you,' ses I, ' as 'ud teach you not to give your services till you get your wage,' ses I, ' a-doin' hall the dirty work the men wants for nothin'. Don' you be ser meek,' ses I, ' an' good day to you.'

" Never did I see a young woman more surprise,' she 'avin' come for to canwass me an' a-findin' 'erself canwassed that severe she 'ad n't nothin 'lef' to say for 'erself. So that done for 'er."

" Was she the last ? " I asked.

" The las'! " echoed Mrs. Green. " No, nor nothink like. Only ten minutes arter along there come another as was firs' cousing to the Librul feller. ' 'Ave you 'eard Mr. Smith's splendid haddress ? ' ses she, sorf. ' The bes' address as *I* 've 'eard,' ses I, short, ' his the address of the man as I 'm a-goin' to vote for,' ses I, ' me speakin' for me 'usbing as thinks with me,' ses I, ' an' that 's Capting White, Pretoria, South Africa,' ses I. ' I don't want

no better address nor that,' ses I. 'But I 'm sure as Mr. Smith would 'a' gone to fight the Boers 'ad 'e felt able so for to do,' ses she, uncerting. 'I 'm sure 'e would,' ses I, perlite, 'if 'e 'ad n't been too busy a-writin' to Mr. Kroojer on 'ow bes' for to fight *hus*,' ses I. So that done for 'er."

"What did she say?" I asked.

"Nothin' much," replied Mrs. Green, with meditative satisfaction. "None on 'em said much once I 'd give 'em a good set-back. It seemed to take the smile out on 'em, as it were, an' they went soon arter. But, bless us, what a stream we 've 'ad! It 's a mercy Govingments don' melt but once in six years or so, or there 's some on us as would be dead an' buried long ago, what with canwassers an' hoil-cars an' all." She sighed.

"Do you mean 'dissolve,' Mrs. Green?" I asked, after a moment's thought.

"I means what I ses," replied Mrs. Green, shortly. "Melt or dissorlve, you can take

which you likes. *I* ses ' melt,' as bein' plainer."

There was a short pause.

" And how are things going in the village ? " I asked.

" Very comfrerble, so to speak," said Mrs. Green, meditatively. " The Libruls is very 'opeful, an' so is the Conservatives, hevery one a-promisin' for to support 'em both, an' a-givin' on 'em votes o' confidence at hevery meetin' mos' kin' an' himpartial."

" But what do you think yourself, Mrs. Green ? " I asked.

Mrs. Green flushed suddenly.

" If you harsks me what *I* thinks," she said, " I can tell it you plain as I tells it Green. It 'ill be a cryin' scandil an' a burnin' shame if we goes an' turns on the Govingment now, an' they 'avin' bore sech a hanxious time, so to speak, an' a-comin' smilin' through ser many hupsets, as it were. Ah, *I* knows what it is to suffer in silence. An' what 's more, as I ses to Green, ses I, ' You look aroun' an' what do

you see ?' ses I. 'Why,' ses I, 'the 'ole worl' a-settin' waitin' for to 'ave a larf at us,' ses I.

"But they 'll larf the wrong side of their mouths afore *we* 've finished with 'em," she added, with vindictive vigor, "an' if Green's vote can do it, do it it shell!"

There was another pause. Mrs. Green suddenly relapsed into dignified solemnity.

"Me speakin' fer Green, as thinks with me in sech matters," she said, "an' 'avin' took 'im for to vote Conservative this blessid arternoon."

IX

"MISSIONAIREYS"

"WINTER bein' come upon us hunaware, so to speak," said Mrs. Green, thoughtfully, "an' me 'avin' one poun' four an' sevingpence 'apeny laid by again a rainy day, or likewise a cold one, I went into Sevingoaks this arternoon an' done a bit o' shoppin'."

"I shall shortly have to do some shopping, too, I 'm afraid," I replied, with equal thoughtfulness.

"Ah, it 's a wearin' matter," said Mrs. Green, with a sigh.

I looked at her hastily, but her countenance showed a solemnity that precluded all thought of a joke.

" It is, indeed," I said, and we sighed again in concert.

Mrs. Green wrapped her arms tightly one in the other.

Having met in the cold twilight under the beeches—I on my way up to the house, she on her way down from it—we had paused to exchange the news of the hour.

" There 's those as does their shoppin' in the village," she resumed, with gloomy emphasis, " an' thinks theirselves dressed. *Covered* they may be, an' doubtless is, an' let us never discouridge no one as fin's theirselves 'appy deceived. But *dressed* they is not, nor never could be so called by them as knows what dressin' is, seein' as 'ow Wilkinses' fashings is two years be'ind the times, an' dusty at that. Not as it 's no one's fault."

She sighed wearily.

" As I tol' Mrs. Smith this arternoon, me bein' in me noo tightfittin' jacket an' me feathered 'at, as I seed 'er a-tryin' not to

notice: ' Ah, Mrs. Smith,' ses I, ' it 's a ninstink,' ses I, ' as is borned in some wimming, but can't never be learned no one,' ses I, ' nor never will.' "

" And are the fashions newer in Sevenoaks?" I asked.

" ' Las' from Paris ' writ large on 'em all," returned Mrs. Green, solemnly, " an' the young persons be'ind the counter mos' obligin'. An' what I ses is, let it be ser low as five shillin's, or even ser 'igh as a poun', you 're safe ser long as you 're French.

" I should n't 'a' been ser partickler over a day or two, cold though it is," she added, with dignity, " but me summer things is wore to rags, an' there bein' a large prayer meetin' on in Tubely las' night, of course I 'ad to go tidy. There 's no need to min' appearin' in dishables, as it were, in our hown parish, where Green an' me is well known to 'ave clothes be'ind us whatever we wears, but another parish is a different matter, an' mus' be dressed to."

"And was the meeting a nice one, Mrs. Green?"

"Well, Miss," replied Mrs. Green, reflectively, "it were an' it were n't. It were a mixture of church an' chapel, so to speak, as no one could n't set out to enjy quite 'earty. Es far as the parsons went, as sat a-smilin' wonderful thick upon the platform, it was all right; they a-runnin' on the ole lines an' a-prayin' steady out of the Prayer-book—as was safe, so to speak, if slow. But when it come to the little missionairey woman as was there for to do the mission part, an' she chapel-borned, as you knowed the momingt she opened 'er lips—" Mrs. Green paused and shook her head sadly.

"What was she like?" I asked.

"Silly," replied Mrs. Green, tersely, "an' nothin' more. A silly little missionairey female as you wondered the 'eathen 'ad n't eat."

"But why should they eat her, Mrs. Green?" I asked, reproachfully.

"Along of sheer aggerawation," said Mrs. Green, with sudden and forcible irritation; " an' no blame to 'em."

There was a pause.

" It was the Reverent Mr. Wood as introjooced 'er," said Mrs. Green, " an' 'e done it quite kin'-like so as to make 'er feel 'appy among ser many stryngers. But, bless you, *she* did n't need no makin' 'appy! She 'd come for to make *us* 'appy, she said, though why she should feel ser sure as we 'ad n't been 'appy afore she come, I don' know, and it that rude to the parsons as preaches steady week in week out. Which there was a boy be'ind me as passed remarks low the 'ole time, 'e bein' a 'ardened sinner an' a-larfin' constant, an' what with 'im be'ind, an' 'er on the platform, an' ole Mrs. Giles jes' in front as thought she was in chapel, and no blame to 'er, a-groanin' constant whenever the Lord was mentioned, I got that worried I could n't 'ardly set."

" What mission was it ? " I asked.

"For to sen' the Gorspel to the Chinee," said Mrs. Green, shortly, "which it strikes me they want a-sendin' somethin' stronger. She said as 'ow they was pore 'elpless 'eathen as we was to give money to with all our might constant. She were a thin little woman with a little face on 'er, an' blinkin' eyes, an' she spoke solemn an' sad in a weak voice as she took to be pious, but was n't. 'Me beloved brothers han sisters,' ses she, a-takin' a deal too much on 'erself for to begin with, we not feelin' in no way draw'd for to become 'er relations, 'I 've been ask' to speak to you,' ses she. 'Tell me 'oo it was an' I 'll kick 'im for yer,' ses the boy be'ind me. 'But firs' we 'll 'ave a little prayer,' ses she, sorf. 'That 's the fifteenth to-night, an' they was n't none on 'em little,' ses the boy be'ind me. So she shuts 'er eyes an' fol's 'er 'an's, an' she prays severil times over, she not bein' able for to think of nothin' more for to say, as 'ow the Lord would sen' to each 'eart there the speshil messidge which 'e

'ad prepared for to sen' it, which seemed to me a waste of breath, seein' as 'ow what 'e 'ad prepared for to sen', 'e *would* sen', without 'er a-nudgin' of 'im, as it were. 'Owever, she meant it well, an' hup we all got again when she was done, an' then she set out for to haddress us. ' I 'ad a call for to come 'ere an' speak to you, dear people,' ses she, gentle, ' an' was *I* to say no ? ' ses she. ' Bless your, yes,' ses the boy be'ind me, cheerful, ' an' the horfener the better,' ses 'e. ' I 've come to harsk you for to sen' the Gorspel to the pore Chinee,' ses she. ' An' if you 'll take it 'im yourself *hat* once,' ses the boy be'ind me, ' we will,' ses 'e, ' an' 'appy so for to do.' "

" But, Mrs. Green, he was a scoffing little wretch," I said, rebukingly.

Mrs. Green sighed.

" 'E were," she said. " 'E certingly were. I seed that myself. I turns round to 'im an' I ses, ' Look 'ere, me boy,' ses I, ' if *I* can stand 'er, an' keep quiet, so can you,' ses I,

'an' you 'll please to do so, or hout you 'll go,' ses I, 'for the pair on you is a-drivin' on me wil'.' To say nothin' of Mrs. Giles as kep' a-groanin' loud an' 'appy in front."

"Did it make him any better?" I asked.

"I can't trewly say as 'ow it did," replied Mrs. Green, thoughtfully. "You could n't 'ardly expec' as it should, an' 'er talkin' ser silly. She was the kin' of little woman as never said what she set out for to say, an' yet she looked that resigned an' 'appy over it, it aggerawated you for to see 'er, you perceivin' plain 'ow silly she were. 'Let me give you a reason why the Chinee should 'ave mission-aireys sent 'em,' ses she; 'they don' want us,' ses she, sorrerful. 'An' 'ere 's another reason,' ses she, an' she pulls out a pair o' shoes as a baby could n't 'a' wore. 'That 's what the growned wimming 'ave to get their feet into,' ses she. 'Is n't *that* a reason why they should 'ave the Gorspel sent 'em?' ses she, solemn. Though what it 'ad to do with

the Gorspel it beats me to think, an' always will do, it bein' more a matter of the fashings, so to speak, like tight-lacin' an' sich. ' An' now I speaks to the girls,' ses she, low an' sad. ' Ho, girls,' ses she, ' they smothers the girl babies an' keeps the boys,' ses she. ' Think 'ow dreadful, girls,' ses she, ' if all on you a-settin' 'ere 'ad been smothered when you was borned,' ses she. ' They would n't 'ardly be settin' 'ere in that case,' ses the boy be'ind me. ' Ho, sen' the missionaireys for to stop 'em doin' it!' ses she. ' Nothin' of the sort,' ses the boy be'ind me, ' they 're a sensible lot,' ses 'e; ' wish *I* lived there,' ses 'e; ' there 's a deal too many girls about, and this is what comes on it,' ses 'e.

" Arter that I could n't stan' no more. Up I gets, an' I takes 'im by the collar, calm. ' Hout you comes, me man,' ses I. ' *One* on you 's got to go,' ses I, ' an' since it can't be 'er, it must be you,' ses I, an' I runs 'im down the room an' out at the door, 'e a-gigglin' ser

much 'e could n't show no fight. ' 'Ush, 'ush!' ses all the parsons, shocked, an' the little woman she stan's a-prayin' patient to 'erself, a-shuttin' of 'er eyes an' a-wavin' of 'er 'ead. But once I was out," added Mrs. Green, meditatively, " I stops out."

" But one should n't criticise good people," said I.

" You may be right, Miss," said Mrs. Green, stolidly, " an' then again you may not. Because we 're pore folk an' they 're pious missionaireys ain't no reason why they should be silly into the bargain, nor it ain't no reason neither why we should n't see as 'ow they are, when they 'apping so for to be. The las' missionairey meetin' we 'ad a biship come down to talk to us, a gentleman with a pair of shoulders to 'im as could 'a' killed an ox. There was n't no larfin' an' talkin' while 'e was there. 'E spoke straight an' 'e spoke strong, an' you could 'a' 'eard a pin fall. ' I 've come for to speak for folks worse horf nor you,' ses 'e,

' in countries where we 'as our markits an' does our trade,' ses 'e. ' We sen's a lot of bad there,' ses 'e, ' carn't 'elp ourselves to a large hextent,' ses 'e, ' 'elp me to sen' a bit of good there, too, 'ses 'e. Ah, that *were* a meetin'! Sevril rushed out for to go 'ome an' fetch their money as they 'd lef' be'ind a-thinkin' for to 'ear the usual thing, an' me 'avin' brought a penny as I could n't bear for to put in, I borrered a shillin' from Mrs. Brown an' never repentid on it, no, nor never shall. But you 'll catch your death of cold if you stan's 'ere a-talkin' ser long, Miss."

So we parted.

X

"ME PHOTO"

"I WAS a two min's which to weir," said Mrs. Green, thoughtfully, "me white or me blew velvet, with me brown bewts, as 'as been ser much admired in London. 'Ad it been catch-cold-catch-me-up weather, or 'ad it been right down 'ot, I should 'a' known, of course; but it turnin' out a betwixt an' between, I 'ad a rare time decidin'. Change, an' twist, I did, an' got that 'ot me fringe come out three times as flat as me 'an'. That 's the worst of 'avin' ser many changes of costoome."

She sighed heavily.

"If you 'as but one bes' dress, then you knows what to weir! As I ses to Mrs. Brown

las' Sunday, she bein' in 'er ole black as she weirs week hin week hout till I 'd be ashamed for to be seen in it, 'Never you start a-henvyin' me, Mrs. Brown,' ses I, me bein' in me white, as I seed 'er eye on. 'You carn't tell till you tries,' ses I, 'what a wearin' an' a frettin' a large wardrobe is to a woman,' ses I. 'You 're better orf as you are,' ses I, 'if honly you knewed it,' ses I, 'an' I speaks from hegspearience.'"

She sighed again.

"What were you going to do?" said I.

Mrs. Green began to polish the handle of my door in a dark yet dignified abstraction.

"Oh! I was only a-goin' to 'ave me photo took," she said, lightly.

This carelessness on such a point had a magnificent effect. You knew at once that she must have had her photograph taken at least twice before in her lifetime.

"No! Were you, *really?*" said I. "How very delightful!"

"Oh, yes!" said Mrs. Green, with telling preoccupation. "I were."

She sighed; surveyed the door-handle, first from one side and then from the other. Finally she once more attacked it vigorously.

After a moment, a smile of dignified gratification broke slowly through the studied indifference of her countenance. It was not an official smile, so to speak. It was merely a concession to weakness. She preserved a careless silence throughout, and averted her face.

There was a short pause.

Mrs. Green was doing a week's charing up at the house, in view of the pressure of work entailed upon the other servants by the forthcoming wedding.

Never do I live in a state of more uncomfortable cleanliness than during those times when she is ministering to the household crises! She seems to char forever in my room, and still to char anew.

But I bear it in silence. I fall over pails, and step on hairy swabs, and contemplate my brushes in my basin on my bed, and search mildly for my boots under a dust-sheet with my books upon my sofa, and say nothing. The great essential of charing is to lift everything up off the floor and lose it. Then you char undeterred all day till the evening and the owner return together, and wailings and lamentations arise, and sometimes other things.

Nevertheless, when it is Mrs. Green who chars, I bear it in silence.

"Not as I 'oles with wanity meself," resumed Mrs. Green, with startling abruptness, suddenly conquering the undue expansion of her features, and returning to an unspeakable gloom of demeanor; "but Green 'e beg me with the tears a-runnin' down 'is cheeks, an' me thinkin' on hall as is for to come, I give in."

"I 'm so glad you did," said I, cheerfully.

"'Anna,' ses Green, ses 'e," went on Mrs.

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Green, with ever-increasing solemnity, "'the time 's a-comin' near,' ses 'e, 'when——'"

"Oh! *don't*, Mrs. Green," I said, hurriedly.

Mrs. Green groaned with unutterable heaviness, and again attacked the door-handle.

"Fur be it from me, Miss," she said, darkly, "for to shadder the 'appy smilin's of the young. But there 's woes as 'as for to come, and partin's an' 'owlin's an' 'nashin's of teeth, an' them as is wise prepares theirselves before 'and. An' so I tells Green."

"But we 're going to have you with us for many happy years yet, Mrs. Green," said I, inspiringly.

Mrs. Green flatly refused to take lot or part in such impious lightness of heart.

"'*Appy!*" she said, groaning again, "'oo 's 'appy? You look aroun' you, Miss, an' what do you see? The skelington an' the worm a-gnawin' in hevery cupboard."

"Oh, surely not, Mrs. Green," I said, feebly.

"In one 'ouse it 's a temper," went on Mrs. Green, deeply, "in hanother it 's a hillness, in hanother it 's a nusbing; but it 's somethin' heverywheres. No! 'Appy we har *not*, nor was we ever meant so for to be. But there 's better things. As I ses to me harnt's nephew's wife, she a-lyin' with 'er twelth, 'Are yer 'appy, Merier?' ses I, solemn. 'No, 'Anna,' ses she, 'not 'appy, but blessid,' ses she; she a-knowin' of 'er duty. Which when you talks of '*appy*, Miss, you 'ardly knows what you 're a-talkin' *of*, if you 'll excoose me, you bein' that young."

"But I 'm not so very young, Mrs. Green," I said.

"You 're a-gettin' on as fur as bein' merried goes, I grant you, Miss," replied Mrs. Green, gloomily. "But as to the sorrers of life, them 's yet for to fall upon you, which 'Eving send you a numble 'eart for to bear 'em."

Having effectually borne me down with the

weight of her experience, Mrs. Green charred solemnly on.

I watched her with equal solemnity, and there was another short pause.

After a while I said, thoughtfully: "And which dress did you settle to wear to be photographed in, Mrs. Green?"

Mrs. Green's expression instantly changed.

"At the las' momingt," she replied, with an air of serious reminiscence, "I 'urries meself into the blew velvet, an' 'ardly 'ad I got well away from the 'ouse than it come on ter rain! Now, 'ad I wore me white, as can't spot, never a drop of rain would we 'a' 'ad. But sich things is sent by blessid Providence for to try us, an' me a-knowin' better than to trust to 'em, I 'ad me mackingtosh ready with me, an' 'ardly got a drop."

"What a comfort!" said I.

"Green," went on Mrs. Green, meditatively, "'e wanted me for to weir me white, as is certingly becomin' when fresh wash'. 'Look

as yer did the day we was merried, 'Anna,' was what 'e ses, a-weepin'; but seein' as 'ow one on 'em 's for a presingt for Miss Mildred, I ses to Green, ses I, 'It would n't 'ardly do,' ses I, 'for the weddin' guests to go a-harskin', as they 're sure for to do,' ses I, 'a-seein' it a-standin' among the presingts on the table, "'Oo 's this 'ere other bride?"' ses I. 'Back we hought *hall* for to stan',' ses I, 'on sech a day,' ses I, 'a takin' care as there ain't no hover-shadowin' of Miss Mildred, as might be thought.' That decided both on us, weather or no weather. So I wore me blew."

She looked at me.

"It showed a very nice feeling," said I.

"Morehover, I 'as to wear me black bewts with me white," added Mrs. Green, thoughtfully, "an' they ain't as noo as they was."

"Can't you wear your brown boots with your white dress?" I asked, with equal thoughtfulness.

"Brown with blew, an' black with white,"

said Mrs. Green, with decision. "There 's tas'e in hall things. Did I wear black bewts with me blew velvet I should feel that uncomfrerble as there 's no sayin'."

"I did n't know you studied dress effects so carefully," said I.

"I always was a woman as knowed 'ow to dress," said Mrs. Green. "Not as it 's a thing to be henvied; no, nor good looks neither, as you may take to your comfort, Miss. Ah, many 's the time I 've dress' to me sorrer! There was the day I met my firs'. I wore a noo 'at that day—a large 'at, with feathers, as was mos' huncommon. It caught 'is heye on the hinstant, an' there was I a-done for."

"I know," I said, sympathetically.

"Which you carn't do, never 'avin' been merried yourself, Miss," said Mrs. Green, gloomily, and I experienced another relapse.

"Was the photograph a success?" I asked, after a while.

"Thanks to me, it were," said Mrs. Green,

firmly, "an' no thanks to the photographer feller, as only knowed 'alf 'is business, an' that 'alf mos' uncerting. To begin with, 'e 'ad n't no notion 'ow to make a pickcher on it. But me bein' accustomed to the thing, as it were, an' a-knowin' 'ow it ought to be, I 'ad it all settle' in me own min'. I sets meself down firm, me feet together—one bewt a *leetle* forward, as it were, not to look too stiff—me dress a-flowin' graceful on one side, an' a-pulled up careless, as it were, to the front."

She illustrated her description with the appropriate movements.

"An' then I ses as 'ow I was ready. 'Remove the bewts hunder the skirt, please,' ses 'e. 'An' whaffor?' ses I, a-flushin'. 'For to 'ide 'em,' ses 'e. '*'Ide* em,' ses I, 'an' why should I 'ide 'em?' ses I. 'Did I give height an' sexpence for 'em when noo for to 'ide 'em now?' ses I. 'Never!' ses I. 'You 'll take me an' me bewts together,' ses I, 'hor not at all.'"

" And what did he say ? " I asked.

" 'E did n't say nothin'," replied Mrs. Green. " 'E lors' 'is 'ead, an' disappears suddingly under 'is pall a-growin' pale. An' I 'm blessed," she added emphatically, " if 'e would n't a-took me there an' then an' me no time to smile nor nothin'! But I give a yell as brought 'im out quicker nor 'e went in."

" And what did he do ? " said I.

Mrs. Green's face softened.

" 'E come out lookin' that pale me 'eart smote me," she said, meditatively. " I seed it was n't no good a-speakin' to 'im hangry, 'e bein' a timid sort, an' heasy scare'. So I ses to 'im mild-like, ' Where *did* you learn your business, young man ? ' ses I, ' an' you never ser much as harskin' me to look plesingt nor nothin' regler,' ses I. ' You mus' know,' ses I, gentle, ' as this ain't the firs' time I 've been took, me good feller,' ses I, ' an' I knows 'ow things ought for to be done,' ses I. ' I 'm sure I beg your parding, mem,' ses 'e. ' Which

it 's granted, young feller,' ses I, ' an' willin',' ses I, ' if you 'll give me time for to call hup a smile,' ses I."

" And did he ?" I asked.

" ' 'Ad you a-took me then,' ses I," continued Mrs. Green, solemnly, dismissing my premature question with a wave of the hand, " ' it would 'a' been with sech a look of sorrer on me face as is natchrul to it, but would 'a' broke me 'usbing's 'eart for good an' all, 'e bein' a mos' feelin' man, an' a-seein' in it all I 've suffer' in the pas', as is more nor what you 'd think for, perreps, young man,' ses I. ' Never,' ses I, firm, ' will I leave Green with sech a look of sorrer for 'im to set an' grieve on,' ses I. ' Look 'appy I mus',' ses I, ' corst it what it will.' "

She looked at me with an air of unspeakably resigned dignity. " It was most thoughtful of you, Mrs. Green," I said, hastily.

" So 'e waited," went on Mrs. Green, with a heavy sigh, " while I calls hup a cheerful

smile as Green could rejice on arter I was goned where smiles is known no more, as ses the 'ym'. But it was n't so heasy done."

She paused, and plunged into dark thought.

"Why not?" I asked, emphatically.

"Not arter all I been through," said Mrs. Green, heavily. "There I set, a-thinkin' on hall as 'ad 'appen' in the pas', an' on hall as was for to 'appen in the futur', an' do what I would, the tears kep' a-comin'. An' the young man, 'e stood a-gazin' on me as if 'e was strook, that uneasy in the heye, it quite upset me. So at las' I begs 'im for to look out o' winder, which 'e done. An' arter a time, me a-strugglin' to be firm, I got it fix'."

There was a short silence.

"Then 'e went under 'is pall again," resumed Mrs. Green, gloomily. "An'——"

"Under his what?" I asked, mildly.

"'Is black velvet pall," explained Mrs. Green. "A 'andsome piece it were. Which goes over 'is 'ead when 'e ought for to be

a-takin' photographs, which this young man never were."

She pondered a moment in rising displeasure.

"The way 'e kep' a-comin' out an' a-lookin' at me an' a-goin' in again made me giddy," she said, shortly, "till at las' I ses to 'im, 'For 'Eving's sake,' ses I, '*go* hin, an' *stop* hin, an' *do* it,' ses I, 'for me cheeks is achin'.' 'It's *honly* that it looks a *leetle* hunnatchrul, mem,' ses 'e, 'urried, a-comin' out once more with a scared face. 'Somethin' a *leetle* less bright, perreps, meddim,' ses 'e. An' arter that I really could n't stan' no more. 'Perreps *you* 'd fin' a cheerful smile come hunnatchrul,' ses I, sharp, 'if you 'd suffer' as I 've suffer', which may you nor no one never do so in this life *hor* the nex',' ses I. 'You take me as I am,' ses I, 'an' 'urry up,' ses I, 'or I 'll lose it,' ses I, 'and then it won't be *me* as 'ill smile hunnatchrul,' ses I, an' so at las' 'e done it."

She paused for breath.

"And it really is a success?" I asked.

"Parts on it could n't be better," replied Mrs. Green, thoughtfully. "Me bewts an' me 'appy look is there, an' me fringe is nicely curl,' which I 'ad fears it might a-come out, 'e bein' so long an' the room that 'ot. But there 's faults, in course," she sighed.

"Me gloves bein' white no one carn't 'ardly tell as I 've got 'em on, which is a pity, they bein' noo. An' the plewmes in me sailor 'at ain't as mark' as I could wish. But nothin' carn't be perfec' in this life, an I ain't no cause to grumble. As Mrs. Smith ses, ses she, a-seein' of it on a sudding, 'Oh, Mrs. Green,' ses she, quite took aback, 'you *do* look well,' ses she, '*quite* the lady,' ses she, 'I should n't a-known it was you,' ses she."

"And how did Green like it?" I asked.

Mrs. Green's face darkened unutterably.

"Ah," she said, "an' now you harsks a question! 'Ow did Green like it? you ses. It come upon Green with a shock as 'e 'll never forget.

It was to be looked for, an' I 'ad ought to a-shown it 'im quiet like, rememberin' 'is feelin' 'eart. But me forgettin', an' a-drawin' on it keerless out of the honvelope, 'e sees it sudding, an' it ketched 'im sech a blow as it took 'im days to get hover. 'Never,' ses 'e, '*never* 'ave I seen you a-lookin' better, 'Anna,' ses 'e. 'Oh, 'Anna, 'Anna,' ses 'e, 'there 's a brightness in yer heye,' ses 'e a-weepin', 'as goes to my 'eart,' ses 'e, 'an me a-knowin' it to be that different.' 'Ah, Green,' ses I, 'an' when I 'm dead an' buried,' ses I, 'many 's the time you 'll set an' look at that,' ses I, 'a-thinkin' hon all I done for you, an' 'ow comfrerble I made you, a-studyin' of you day an' night,' ses I, 'an' then perreps you 'll remember,' ses I, 'the sorrers as I bore hinside an' hout, never sayin' nothin' an' a-smilin' 'earty for to cheer you up,' ses I. 'Which no one knows nor never will what I 've been through.'"

She relapsed into impenetrable gloom—gazing out of the window, sorrow sitting in her

eye and firm resignation on her compressed mouth.

"I am sure you must have suffered," I said, feelingly.

At this juncture a piercing female shriek came up the stairs.

"Mrs. Green, Mrs. *Green!*"

"Bless us," said Mrs. Green, suddenly returning to life, "that 's dinner."

And she was gone.

XI

" AN 'APPY OPPORTUNITY "

" No," said Mrs. Green, impressively, " there ain't no denyin' of the fac'; Miss Mildred rose to the hoccasion like an 'eron."

" Do you mean ' a heroine,' Mrs. Green ? " I asked, after a moment's thought.

" I *may* do, Miss," replied Mrs. Green, carefully.

" I think you must," said I.

" Whatever I means," said Mrs. Green, " what I ses is that no one could 'a' bore 'erself more brave an' bold than Miss Mildred, an' she a lamb a-goin' to the haltar, as the Bible says, an' well it may do.

" Hup she come an' aw'y she went," con-

tinued Mrs. Green, with waxing enthusiasm, "a-sailin' in sating along the haisle to 'er 'usbing's arms till I could 'a' 'owled for to see 'er a-thinkin' on hall that was for to come, an' the sorrers as would shortly fall. Sarah 'erself, as was not afraid with hany amazement, though well might she 'a' been amazed if Habram was anythink like what they paints 'im in the Bible pickcher books, a-nundred years ole if a day, an' a-flowin' out on hall sides in 'is wimming's clo's mos' strange for to see—not as Capting Swift was like 'im, of course, but might 'a' been 'ad we all lived in them days——"

Mrs. Green paused.

"What was I a-startin' out for to say?" she inquired, thoughtfully.

"You were speaking of Sarah's boldness, I think," said I.

"Which bold she were," replied Mrs. Green, forcibly; "an' why we should be tole for to be like 'er is more than I can think, nor never

will do, she a-larfin' at the hangels from be'ind the door like any idjit, never thinkin' as 'ow they was able for to turn 'er into salt as soon as look at 'er, 'ad they felt so inclined. To say nothin' of the thrustin' forth of 'Agar, as was of course a little mistake of Habram's, an' Sarah 'd 'a' done better for to 'ave thrusted '*im* out—not as I want to say nothin' unchristian again' the 'oly ole man," added Mrs. Green, hastily, "we bein' led for to believe as 'ow '*ad* she so 'a' thrusted of 'im, the Bible would n't never 'ave got itself writ, hall therefore a-turnin' out for the bes'."

She paused again; but I was too much occupied in a hurried review of the Biblical facts she had mentioned to have any remark ready, and after a moment she resumed, with a sigh:

"Well, it 's hover, an' now we 'll see 'ow 'e treats 'er. As I ses to Mrs. Brown, she a-tryin' for to lead me forth from the church to throw rice at the 'appy pair—'Lemme cry, Mrs. Brown,' ses I; 'don' stop me,' ses I,

sobbin'; 'there 's another done for,' ses I, 'an' well may we weep a-thinkin' on the futur', an' she as like me when I married my firs' as never was.' "

Mrs. Green sighed heavily, and there was a short silence.

" 'Owever," she resumed, " fur be it from me for to deny as it was a pretty enough weddin' for them as 'as the 'eart to look to such things through never 'avin' knowed the sorrers of mattermony, an' we was all a-sayin' in the village 'ow well you bore up again' it, Miss, a-smilin' an' a-'idin' of your feelin's till any strynger not a-knowin' of the worm a-gnawin' at the root, so to speak, might 'ave thought as you was 'appy for to walk to church be'ind a younger sister, as mus' 'ave been a n'ard thing to bear patient, which Laban bein' a jus' man would n't allow."

" I did n't mind it, Mrs. Green, thank you," I said, helplessly.

Mrs. Green looked at me with compassion.

"An' it honly too likely, as we was sayin' in the village," she said, gloomily, "as 'ow Miss Margrit 'ill be the nex' to go, an' she seving years younger nor you! Ah, if it 'ad n't been for them 'oly old men a-gettin' that muddled with their wives as mus' 'ave given rise to rows constant, well might we wish for to live in them days, when plain wimming 'ad a chanst. Not as I never 'ad no difficulties that way meself."

She paused, and looked at me again.

"I suppose," she said, with increasing gloom, "as there ain't no one?"

"Not a soul," said I, hastily.

There was another pause.

"There 's the curick," said Mrs. Green, still more gloomily, "a nansome little feller."

"I 'm afraid not, Mrs. Green," I said, with cheerfulness.

"Well, there 's sevril as 'olds 'im so for to be," said Mrs. Green, thoughtfully.

"Oh, I did n't mean that," I said. "I

meant I—he—I—don't you think it 's rather unkind of you to be so anxious to get rid of me, Mrs. Green ? Surely you can put up with me a little longer! "

" Oh, we 'll put hup with you, Miss," said Mrs. Green, encouragingly. " What can't be cured mus' be hindured. Besides, some one may come along yet," she added, meditatively. " It 's not hallways the likeliest people as fin's a nusbing, the tastes of men bein' that strange an' uncerting, as no one need n't reelly give up 'ope till they 're dead."

We spent a moment in silent thought.

" But I hallways *will* say," resumed Mrs. Green, suddenly, with a beaming smile, " that no one could 'a' made a better speech nor James 'Enery, as is Green's firs' cousing twist removed. There 'e stood in the marquee, a-speakin' for hall the other bell-ringers be'ind of 'im ser graceful an' free, a-wavin' of his glass of champagne that keerless-like it might 'a' been a glass o' water, an' it the firs' 'e hor

any on 'em 'ad ever tasted, which it went to their 'eads direct, an' they hall on 'em 'ad to go 'ome soon arter."

"I 'm sorry to hear that," said I.

"Which you need n't be, Miss," said Mrs. Green, checking herself with a glance of dignified and surprised reproach. "It ses plain in the Bible, where all as runs may read, an' all as walks likewise, for matter of that, not heverybody bein' ser strong in the legs as to take 'appy to runnin', as there 's a time to heat an' a time to drink, an' what better time there could be for drinkin' than a weddin' it would be 'ard to say, for hany one with a gen'rous 'eart. Not as I could lay me 'ands sudding on the chapter, so to speak," she added, with increased dignity, "but you bein' a parson's daughter there ain't no need."

"But I don't think it means that exactly," I said, hesitatingly.

"You ask your pa, Miss," said Mrs. Green, patronizingly. "'E 'd 'a' 'ardly done what 'e

did do, 'ad 'e 'a' felt Scripchers again' 'im, an' the bishops that sharp nowadays, a-droppin' down sudding on hall sides mos' hunexpected, as we reads in the papers. No, it were 'is noble kin'ness to the pore, as thought shame of 'avin' one brew for the rich and another for the laborers 'oo 'ad bore the burding an' 'eat of the day in the markit-place, or I should say church-tower a-rangin' an' presbirin' constant for 'ours. One glass honly did them bell-ringers 'ave for to drink Miss Mildred's 'ealth," she continued, with a smile of admiring enthusiasm, " an' the champagne that good it went to their 'eads direct! Which the village is a-talkin' of to this day, an' never will forget."

" I missed James's speech," I said, thoughtfully.

Mrs. Green looked at me, rapidly unwound her arms from her apron, and, with a business-like air, threw herself into the attitude of an orator.

"I can tell you what 'e said, Miss," she said. "'Ere,' ses 'e, 'there 's Miss Mildred which I should say Mrs. Swift's 'ealth,' ses 'e, 'an' 'er 'usbing's, too,' ses 'e, 'which may they be has the vines upon the 'ouse-top,' ses 'e; *that*," added Mrs. Green, in a thoughtful aside, "hallways seemin' to me a strange thing for to say, Bible or no Bible, vines doin' bes' in green-'ousis, as hevery one knows. 'Owever, it come in well there, an 'p'r'aps the summers was warmer in them days. 'Long,' ses 'e," she continued, resuming the lofty tone of oratory with a wave of the arm, "'long 'ave we waited for a weddin' at the Rectory,' ses 'e, 'an' long may we wait for another,' ses 'e, 'but should hany on the hother young ladies hever 'ave the 'appy hopportunity of doin' as Miss Mildred, which I should say Mrs. Swift, 'as 'ad the 'appy hopportunity of doin', may *we* 'ave the 'appy hopportunity of doin' for the hother young ladies what we 'ave 'ad the 'appy hopportunity of doin' for Miss Mildred

to-day,' ses 'e, 'which I should say Mrs. Swift,' ses 'e.

"Hanythink better put," added Mrs. Green, relapsing once more, and glancing solemnly at me, "I never 'eard, nor never 'ope to do."

"It was excellent," I asserted, warmly.

"An' as clear as clear," said Mrs. Green, thoughtfully.

"It was," I replied.

"'But should,' ses 'e," continued Mrs. Green, suddenly waving her arm and lifting her voice again, "'should none on the hother young ladies ever 'ave the 'appy hopportunity of doin' as Miss Mildred, which I should say Mrs. Swift, 'as 'ad the 'appy hopportunity of doin',' ses 'e, 'then let us remember,' ses 'e, serious, 'as 'ow marridge is not hallways what it seems, nor 'usbings hallways lovin'; nor let us forget,' ses 'e, solemn, 'as ses the Scripchers,' ses 'e, 'as 'ow many a single woman lays out for ter be the blessin' of a parish,' ses

'e, 'as well we knows to our cost, an' mos' thankful so for to do.'"

"Nothing could have been better," I said, admiringly, in reply to another dignified glance from Mrs. Green.

"'Ow much of it was James 'Enery," she added, meditatively, "an' 'ow much of it champagne, it 's 'ard to say; but whichhever it were, it done both on 'em credit. They say as 'ow 'e 's to be chose to return thanks at the Smithses nex' month; but whether 'e 'll do ser well on beer remains for to be seen."

"What is going to happen at the Smiths' ?" I asked.

"Another weddin'," said Mrs. Green, with a sigh.

"Oh, yes, of course," said I. "I had forgotten."

"I 'm called, I am," remarked Mrs. Green, from the depths of gloomy thought into which the mention of the Smiths' wedding had plunged her.

"*What* are you?" I inquired, uncertainly.

"Called," repeated Mrs. Green, darkly.

"Where to, Mrs. Green?" I asked gently, after a meditative pause. I thought she meant to Heaven, and the subject was one that required careful handling.

"Ter the Smithses," replied Mrs. Green, tersely, "an' hevery one knows what *that* means! It 's all along of they 'avin' seen the 'andsome plush frame with me photograph as I give Miss Mildred. But they 'll get no plush frame out o' me. There 's limits."

"Will you go to the wedding, then?" I asked.

"Fur be it from me," replied Mrs. Green, solemnly, "for to put sech a slight on the Smithses as my not goin' would mean to the pore well-meanin' souls—heveryone a-harskin', 'An' where 's the Rector's Greens?' 'an' they not a-knowin' where to look, nor what to say. No, that they does *not* deserve! Go I mus', an' with a little sashy in me 'and, or

p'r'aps 'alf a dozing 'angkerchiefs or so, but more I cannot attemp', come what may, an' it the secon' weddin' in the parish this year. There 's limits."

" There are," I replied, with sympathy.

There was a thoughtful pause.

" But I mus' be gettin' on with me work," said Mrs. Green, with a deep sigh. "Good-night to you, Miss."

XII

"ME GOIN' INTER SEVINGOAKS"

"IT 'S their legs as sets *me* all of a flutter," said Mrs. Green, thoughtfully.

We were in the apple-shed, talking about bishops, one having recently visited the parish for a confirmation. Mrs. Green was laying golden russets away in straw, and I was taking them out again and eating them.

"Why?" I asked.

"Them black putties," explained Mrs. Green, "ser strange!"

"But they are n't putties, Mrs. Green," said I.

Mrs. Green looked at me.

"You may *call* 'em hanythink you like, in

course," she said, with dignity. "They hallways does call things out of their names in church. But, to look at—they 're putties."

I dropped the argument and picked out another russet.

"If you don' draw it mild on them airpils, Miss," remarked Mrs. Green, reprovingly, "what 'll your pa say?"

"I don't know," I replied, cheerfully.

"Which no more could no one," said Mrs. Green, relapsing into meditation, "the Rector 'avin' a temper like hany hother man."

We pursued our respective occupations a while in silence. Presently Mrs. Green stopped again and looked at me.

"An' that there little napring," she said, in a tone of thoughtful reminiscence. "Ser comic! Ser many little hoddments about 'im, so to speak! I should like to see 'im took to bits at nights."

I felt, with a slight shock, that these were hardly the aspirations the Bishop had intended

to inspire, but before I could think of an adequate remark, Mrs. Green continued:

"Which 'e mus' halso take a lot of dressin' in the mornin's—pins, you might say, in packits. But they 're hall married men, in course. 'Usbings of one wife,' the Bible ses they 'as for to be, though why they should trouble for to mention the fac' I don' know, seein' as 'ow a clergyman as was n't respectable would never 'ardly think for to get ser 'igh as a bishop."

"Their ideas were so different in those days," I said, hurriedly.

"They was," assented Mrs. Green. "An' the less said about some on 'em the better."

She slowly began once more to stow apples in straw.

"I never feel *quite* meself in this 'ere shed," she remarked gloomily after a minute.

"Why not, Mrs. Green?" I asked, sympathetically.

"Rats," replied Mrs. Green, tersely.

"*No!*" I ejaculated.

"Well, I 'as my suspicions," said Mrs. Green, wearily. "Rustlin's an' squeakin's an' gnawin's an' sechlike. But I ses nothin'. What 'as ter be will be, an' let us expec' no more in sech a wale o' tears."

"Still, I think this barrel is rather low," I said, thoughtfully.

I found a higher one, from the top of which I felt I should be more competent to deal with fate; but Mrs. Green looked at me with a compassionate and resigned smile, and, with a courage I could not but admire, continued upon the bare ground.

"Don't you feel nervous, Mrs. Green?" I asked.

"Dooty," replied Mrs. Green, with the air of a martyr, "comes afore feelin's. Fur be it from me to flee danger when called on for to face the same."

The great superiority of this depressed me a little, and there was a short silence.

"Me goin' into Sevingoaks yesterday," commenced Mrs. Green, unexpectedly, in a conversational tone, continuing to stow away apples while she talked, "for to see me dress-maker about me noo bloose, as I never *can* get meself done justice to in the village, though Mrs. Willis is a good woman enough in many ways, if plain to look upon, which we can't all on us be 'andsome, Providence doin' hevery-think for the bes'—but well hable, as I was sayin', for to satisfy servingts an' sechlike, as *will* hallways go a-spendin' of their wagis hout of the place, instead of layin' by in penny post-orfices built by Govingment, as they should do again' the time when they 're called in church, as all 'opes natchrul for to be——"

She paused, looked doubtfully at me, and plunged into perturbed thought. I perceived her dilemma.

"You going into Sevenoaks yesterday," I said, inspiringly.

Mrs. Green's brow cleared.

"Yes, me goin' into Sevingoaks yesterday," she resumed, vigorously, "not as I 'av'n't done me winter shoppin' hallready, which I 'olds it ter be a foolish thing to leave it till late, an' hall sorts of hailments a-flyin' aroun', so to speak—pewnomia an' sechlike—as me mother's huncle-be-marridge died on a-screamin' to the hend, 'e 'avin' lef' orf 'is winter westis too soon, an' a-drinkin' 'is beer cold on a neated hinside, in spite of hall me mother's harnt kep' a-warnin' on 'im — she a-knowin' well 'ow heasy ser stout a man might be 'urried off to 'Eving, as it were, an' 'avin' no wish, pore soul, for to take in washin' as a widder."

Mrs. Green suddenly paused once more, pondered deeply for a moment, glanced at me, and pondered anew. Finally, with firmly compressed mouth, and a short but bitter sigh, she recommenced, assiduously and in silence, to stow away apples.

There was another pause.

"You going into Sevenoaks yesterday," I said, thoughtfully, as though the idea had just occurred to me.

"It ain't no use me startin' again," said Mrs. Green, gloomily, "though you means it kin', an' as sech I takes it. Ah, I shall be glad when it 's hall hover, an' I 'as me speech once more. 'There 's peace, there 's peace in the nawful grave,' as ses the 'ym'—not a church 'ym'—chapel—church 'ym's a-keepin' careful to 'appier thoughts, as it were, a-tryin' for to make things plesingt, an' small blame to 'em. But there 'll be no hinsides in 'Eving to muddle a person's 'ead, if what we 'ears of cherubims an' seruphims is true—as *is* mostly wings!—a-makin' on 'em feel that wore out along o' what they 've been through, they can't 'ardly say two words straight together, let 'em try hever so. Which natchrul to me it is not, nor never will be, me gettin' the prize for speakin' po'try at school, hover an' hover again when I was young. 'Puppa's Letter'

bein' the las' piece I hever spoke, an' many 's the one as wep' to 'ear me."

"I 'm sure they must have," said I. "There 's nothing moves me more than to listen to your stories, Mrs. Green."

A slow smile of reluctant gratification broke over Mrs. Green's darkened countenance. She sighed.

"And what happened in Sevenoaks?" said I, conversationally and cheerfully. "Did you have a pleasant expedition?"

Mrs. Green sighed heavily once more; then, with an air of dark, yet firm resignation, she again began slowly.

"Me goin' into Sevingoaks yesterday, an' nearly losin' me train through firs' a-meetin' Mrs. Smith in 'er black sating an' horspreys, an' 'avin' for to heggsplain careful to 'er 'ow I come to be 'avin' me noo bloose made in Sevingoaks, she a-knowin' well, though pertendin' differend, as 'ow Green an' me bein' parsonage people, as it were, an' a-feelin'

bounden so for to do, hallways when possible an' not too ruinous nor 'ideous, studies to spen' our seleries gen'rous in the place, we never wishin', whathever may be spread abroad by scandalizin' people, for to raise no evil feelin's as might cause hupsets in church circles, which I tole 'er so plain, not a 'idin 'of the fac' which hall as 'ad eyes could see, that them as 'as no figgers natchrul need n't to trouble theirselves about studyin' the fit of their clo'es, they never lookin' much more than 'op-poles, an' that afore the vines is growed, whatever they weirs."

"And did you catch your train into Sevenoaks?" I asked, mildly.

"'Alfway to the station did I get, *an'* more," replied Mrs. Green, flushing with sudden wrath—"me 'avin' showed Mrs. Smith 'er mistake, an' a-sayin' good-bye to 'er 'earty —when I finds as 'ow Green 'ad give me sixpence instead of 'alf a sovring! Back I 'ad to gallip, if you 'll believe me, an' me inside ser

weak an' all, right acrost them there station fields. 'Owever, me comin' sudding on Green, as thought I was in Sevingoaks, it give 'im sech a turn 'e was hall no-'ow, bein' forced for to set hunexpected in a cabbidge bed, through a-takin' me for me ghos', an' a-feelin' certing as there 'd been a naccident on the line. Which there 'ad n't been no naccident, nor I was n't no ghos', as I showed 'im plain—though well I might 'a' been, along of what could 'a' 'appened in a ninstant, as it were, through me a-rushin' ser fas' in me Sunday gown, as sets ser well, which hevery momingt might 'a' been me nex' an' las'."

"And did you catch the train to Sevenoaks?" I asked, gently, as Mrs. Green paused to fan herself violently.

"Three minutes to spare," she replied, triumphantly, "an' me as pale as pale. Which there ain't never no need to think you can't catch a train on the South-Heastern, it orften 'appening as 'ow you fin' yourself in the one

before, when you 're a-thinkin' 'appy an' breathless as 'ow you 've jus' caught the one you're goin' by. To say nothin' of the one arter," she added, thoughtfully, " as seldom seems to me to go at all."

There was a short pause.

" What did you do in Sevenoaks ? " I asked, brightly.

" Well may you harsk," replied Mrs. Green, solemnly, " me 'avin' 'ad sech a time a-gettin' there an' all. It might 'a' tried the patience of Job, let alone a saint, which it hallways seems to me as Job 'ad n't no call for to set 'isself ser violent in dust an' ashes like any ole 'en enjyin' of 'erself a-scratlin' in a n'ole, seein' as 'ow 'e might 'a' knowed for certing 'Eving cud give 'im a noo fam'ly in time, wives bein' that plentiful in them days, an' the Scripchers not a-'avin' gone ser far as they was forced for to do arterwards. 'Owever, 'e 'ad 'is trials, no doubt—though so 's hothers, an' whether it 's houtside, as 'is was, pore feller, or hinside,

as some 'as to bear, we 're hall on us worms of hearth, as ses the 'ym', to say nothin' of hashes, as seems to me bes' lef' to poultry."

Mrs. Green paused for breath, and I struck in hurriedly. "Did you have a pleasant time in Sevenoaks, Mrs. Green?"

"What I was tryin' for to tell you," said Mrs. Green, with a glance of the sternest dignity—"if you 'd give me the chanst, Miss—was somethin' as 'appinged in Sevingoaks yesterday, as you might like to tell your pa, 'e bein' that set on politicks. Me travellin' to Sevingoaks be rail, which the kerridge as I got into was that full of milingtary, I 'ardly 'ad room to set, but never said no word, for hif there 's hanythink I hadmire it 's the soldiers as is comin' back from droppin' dead for their Queen an' country, bless 'em—brave 'earts an' a bole bearin' bein' what I hallways did look to from a chil', seein' as 'ow there 's few things I fears meself, an'——"

"What was *that?*" said I, with sudden excitement.

"What! Where?" ejaculated Mrs. Green, with a horrified leap in the air.

"*There!*" said I, breathlessly, pointing to a distant corner.

Mrs. Green looked. As she did so the straw heaved again and a shining eye looked out.

It was a rat.

The instant and terrific yell that rang through the shed startled me to such an extent I fell off my barrel, shrieking from sheer sympathy.

When I had gathered myself up I looked around me, trembling.

Mrs. Green was gone.

XIII

"THEM 'ENS"

"'ERE 'S Christmas come an' goned," said Mrs. Green, solemnly, "an' where har we?"

She looked at me with gloomy challenge. We were at that moment in the cow-shed, as it happened, whither she had come after eggs and I after new milk; but I perceived she referred rather to a spiritual than a material environment.

"Where, indeed?" said I, hastily.

"You may trewly say—*nowheres*," said Mrs. Green, emphatically, still fixing me with her eye.

"Ah," I replied, shaking my head.

"An' never shall we be hanywheres to

speak of," continued Mrs. Green, with a rapid twisting of the arms in her apron, " till the little curick's words come true, as he spoke ser bewtiful among the 'olly in 'is sermon on Christmas morning, an' we all on us sets down with the lion and the lamb, a-singin', ' 'Ark, 'ark, 'ark, the 'eril hangils sing,' to the same Christmas pudding hall the world hover, which is a thing I never could eat meself without sewere sufferin', an' not too likely to agree with the savidge nations either, when you come to think of it, as is accustomed to different diet, so to speak, though best not to speak of it at all, bein' mos' hunpleasant." Mrs. Green paused for breath.

" I 'm afraid I don't quite follow you, Mrs. Green," said I, helplessly.

" An' better not," replied Mrs. Green, mournfully, as one from dark heights of thought. " Better not! There 's a song as ses cheerful, ' Come, fly with me to a coral cave,' which chilly it would be this weather, if possi-

ble. But mos' roads hend hotherwise, an' them as stays at 'ome is safest arter all—if dull."

"I mean I fear I don't quite understand you," said I.

"Nor do I expect it of you, Miss," said Mrs. Green, rapidly. "Many 's the 'eadache Green gets a-tryin' it, 'e bein' slow in the brain, pore little chap, though feelin'. But what I ses is—where 's Master Frank, as should 'ave been at 'ome a-stirrin' of the Christmas pudding with 'is sisters long ago, which 'e always eat more nor 'e stirred, bless 'im! along of 'is little weakness for curringts? There 'e is, a-settin' be'ind 'is gun in South Afriky, like any figger-'ead, as 'e 'as done steady for a year; an' likely so to set, pore boy, for many a year more, Christmas or no Christmas. Though what good 'im or hany on 'em thinks to be doin' by it beats me, an' always will, the Boers ser seldom a-'appenin' for to be where the Hinglish a-'appens for to

shoot. No, the curick spoke trewth—though I always shell say as 'ow 'e should be give a footstool to speak from, 'is little legs bein' that low you can't see no more than 'is face a-peakin' hanxious over the pulpit, which 'ud spoil hanybody's thoughts, 'owever solemn. 'Let 's 'ave peace an' good will as soon as maybe,' ses 'e, 'war bein' that dangerous,' ses 'e, 'an' fetch 'em all 'ome!'"

"But we can't, Mrs. Green," said I.

"Then we *hought*," said Mrs. Green, firmly, "or there 'll be very few on 'em left to fetch, an' then 'ow silly we 'll look."

Feeling further argument to be rather useless, I sipped my milk in silence.

Suddenly a comfortable rustle made itself heard in the hay near by. Mrs. Green started and flushed. "*'Ark!*" she said, breathlessly.

We listened. An unmistakable settling-down sound made itself heard once more.

"Them 'ens might be Christians, the way they lays about," ejaculated Mrs. Green, in

exasperated wrath, and she rushed wildly upon the darkest recess of the cow-shed. Thence there immediately arose a despairing commotion, and, after a short but stormy interval, an embittered hen hurried squawking and curtseying from its fond retreat, and Mrs. Green emerged. "I chivies 'em 'ere, an' I chivies 'em there," she said, in strong agitation, "but in their nestes they will not lay, chivy 'em 'ow I will! Like as not that 'en 'ill rush off to set itself determined in the pig-sty. For the foxes I can *not* speak, not knowin' their ways, nor wishful so to do, but as to the nestes of the fowls—them 's the las' place they takes to lay their 'eads in, Scripcher nor no Scripcher —let alone their heggs, which is all I harsk."

"It must be very trying," said I, soothingly.

"Tryin' it is," said Mrs. Green, shortly, "along o' many hother things which only them as 'as to go through with it knows hanythink on."

Silence fell again, and after a moment the flush faded from Mrs. Green's cheek, and she sighed heavily.

" 'Ens or 'usbings or 'ats," she said, resignedly, " there 's sorrer an' grief in all. Look at pore Mrs. Russell as married beneath 'er into rabbit-skins an 'ole bottles. 'Ow brave she bore up to the hend, honly to be cast down and 'nashed upon when all was hover, an' she a noo-made widder."

" Poor thing! " said I.

" Ah, well may you say so, Miss," replied Mrs. Green, impressively, " for a plainer corp I never wish to see. As she ses to me yesterday, me goin' for to cheer 'er up an' set with 'er like hany sister—' Oh, Mrs. Green,' ses she, a-weepin', ' 'e 's goned to glory, pore dear,' ses she, ' a-tryin' of me to the hend an' hafter,' ses she. ' I *did* think 'e 'd 'a' made a better corp arter all I 've bore from 'im,' ses she, pore thing—'an' me a bemeanin' of meself that low for to marry 'im at all.'

"But there was n't no 'idin' of the fac'," added Mrs. Green, with a sigh, "though they tried heverything, from flowers to double curtings. Plain 'e lived an' plain 'e died—a disappointment to the hend. Now, my first made a bewtiful corp!"

"You were mentioning hats, I think, Mrs. Green," said I.

"Never!" said Mrs. Green, solemnly. "Let 'ats an' all sech wanities be fur from hour thoughts in sech hours."

"Oh, yes, of course," I replied, hastily.

Mrs. Green sighed again. "It 's strange 'ow seldom things turns out as you think they' re a-goin' to turn," she said, thoughtfully, "from corpsis on. There was the squire's blankits, now! A better-livin' man could n't be, of course—once to church reg'lar hevery Sunday when fine, and a brace of pheasant to the parson hevery season, an' hall ser proper an' decent at the Park, as it were, if quiet, an' perreps careful—through rents bein' low, an'

riches that uncerting. But when them blankits come a-Christmas, as 'e 'd promised me in summer through me a-teachin' of 'is noo dairy-woman, never did I see sech a small set-out, nor Green neither, as 'e ses plain. Single, if you 'll believe me! an' me a married woman as 'e knowed as well as I did! an' more than 'alf cotting, inter the bargin. 'This 'ere 's a mistake,' ses I, 'or ought ter be ef it ain't,' ses I. 'Then let us take it kin' as sech,' ses I, 'there bein' nothin' like arstin'.'"

"So what did you do?" I asked, as Mrs. Green paused and plunged into deep thought.

"Arstid," she replied, briefly.

"Was the squire vexed?" I asked.

"It was *me* that was vexed," returned Mrs. Green, meditatively—"an' natchrul. 'Owever, never think no ill on no one till certing of the same, nor bear no evil as can be set right, as ses the Scripchers. Which 'e changed 'em for double ones, an' wool all through at that, heggsplainin' 'earty, as 'ow 'e 'd left the

matter to 'is 'ousekeeper, as might, of course, 'ave been the truth. There 's nothin' like arstin'."

"There is not," I agreed.

At this juncture a dignified hen with a thoughtful eye appeared in the doorway, and cast a preoccupied glance, at once of pleasing reminiscence and justifiable hope, around the shadows of the cow-shed.

Mrs. Green, perceiving it, turned instantly crimson.

"*Shoo!*" she screamed with passionate emphasis and a furious wave of the arms.

The hen, with a fearful start, became suddenly aware of us, and fled shrieking. We heard it wildly explaining what had happened to the other hens outside in the orchard.

"There you are!" said Mrs. Green, bitterly. "What do you think of *that?* 'Ad you an' I not been 'ere by the mercy of Providence, that 'en would 'a' laid its hegg in the

'ay as sure as fate. It 's enough to drive a person into a convent like hany madman."

"Do you mean an asylum, Mrs. Green?" I asked.

"I may do," said Mrs. Green, shortly. "Madmen lives in both, es fur as I can 'ear—a-tyin' of their middles hup with rope, an' a-singin' of 'ym's loud at two o'clock in the mornin' when no one dreams of listenin' to 'em, all sensible Christians bein' asleep. Which I seed in the papers the hother day, as 'ow the Pope 'ad hopened a door, an' the fuss they made about it! As if hevery one did n't hopen doors, an' shut 'em too, fifty times a day."

"But there was an especial meaning in it, Mrs. Green."

"I don' doubt they *said* so," replied Mrs. Green, contemptuously. "You can *say* hany-think! 'Owever, perhaps it was the papers as was in fault. The things they write is horften sech as hought to be disallowed by Goving-

ment. Honly a short time ago there was the Duke of somethin' or hother a-harstin' the Queen of 'Olland for to marry 'im in low German! 'Igh German is bad enough, which it is to be supposed that there Frewline as was governess 'ere tried for to speak it, if failin' horften through bein' furrin. What it is when low, it 's 'ard for to imagine, an' if 'e did n't know no better than to use sech langwidge an' she a Queen, they 'd 'a' done wiser to keep it quiet. Not——"

She broke off suddenly.

"'*Ark*," she said, with a gasp.

From the direction of the haystacks came the voice of a hen, uplifted in that unmistakable cackle of self-satisfaction with which, its duty done, the barnyard fowl strides forth again to resume the business of the day. Mrs. Green looked at me as though words failed her; then, seizing a broom, with fierce determination on every feature, she rushed swiftly forth. Shortly after, a wild uproar arose upon

the noontide air, and as I left the cow-shed on my way to the house I caught a distant glimpse of Mrs. Green fleeing rapidly over the grass—flushed but relentless—once more busily engaged in " chivying " the shrieking hens.

XIV

"THE DAY I WENT A-SKATIN'"

"THE ways of Providence is strange," said Mrs. Green, solemnly, "an' sometimes, so to speak, 'ardly sensible. Yet let us never despair on 'em till obliged so for to do. As I ses ter Green yesterday—'im a-mournin' bitter over 'is frewt-trees, which this 'ere fros' 'as nip' crool, through them bein' that forward, as is a mos' hunnecessary thing for 'em ter be at all this time o' year (come to think on it, but doubtless the will of 'Eving)—'Green,' I ses; 'Green,' ses I——"

At this moment Mrs. Green's right foot shot violently out in front of her, and with a shriek of surprise she came to the ground.

I helped her up in haste, and brushed the snow from her. On fully recovering, she cast a glance of embittered dignity upon me, turned swiftly round, and proceeded, with stern determination in every feature, to retrace her steps.

"You come along o' *me*, Miss," she said, bitterly, "an' let 's 'ave done with this 'ere temptin' of Providence."

After a moment she added, breathing heavily: "Which while this weather lastes, Green can see to the calves."

Mingling the utmost caution with an air of unspeakable dignity, the effect of which was only slightly marred by the violence of the unpremeditated slides that punctuated her progress, Mrs. Green labored before me up the snowy field.

Not till we were safely on the swept path again did she relax her portentous silence. Then she turned to survey the perils we had overcome; her clouded brow slowly cleared; she heaved a deep sigh.

"Green bein' small," she remarked, thoughtfully, "'as more 'ope of fallin' about without 'urtin' 'isself. But me bein' better growed, as it were, an' 'avin' a larger surfis for to fall on, the chanst of me not bein' 'it somewheres is small. Let alone me hinside, as makes all sech sudding hactions mos' hunsafe." She paused, pondered a moment, and added with emphasis:

"Which while this 'ere weather lastes, Green can see to the calves."

"I think he had really better," I agreed.

"'E *shell* do," replied Mrs. Green, firmly, and we proceeded solemnly upon our way.

"Many 's the strange manner I 've travelled about the world, an' hup an' down it, as it were," began Mrs. Green, conversationally, after a while, "from helephant-ridin' at zoos, as was mostly hup, to switch-backin' at the Hexhibition, as was mostly down—a-judgin' by the feelin's, so to speak, if not by the fac's. Which hallways did I feel to 'ave left me hin-

side on the top of hevery 'ill as I come down a-yellin' like the wind, an' never 'opin' for to be meself no more. But it was n't nothin' to the day I went a-skatin', as it might 'a' been a day like this 'ere."

"Can you skate, Mrs. Green?" I asked.

"I can *not*, Miss," replied Mrs. Green, with dignity, "an' 'as strong 'opes of never bein' forced so for to do. Hunless 'Eving sees fit to sen' me orf on the sudding to Greenlan's hicy mountings, hor Hindia's coral stran', as ses the 'ym', you never knowin' what a day may bring forth, an' the ways of Providence bein' that uncerting. But may we long be spared sech a trial as that would be," she added, thoughtfully, "seein' as 'ow there 'd be nothin' for it but to take to skatin' immeget at whatever corst, or helse set steady on one spot for rever more. Which skatin' on the flat is slippery enough, 'Eving knows, but what it mus' be to go a-slidin' hup an' down mountings it beats me to imagine an' hallways will

do. Well may the pore things want mission-aireys."

"But there is n't any immediate prospect of you having to go to Greenland, is there, Mrs. Green?" said I, cheerfully.

Mrs. Green instantly groaned aloud. "'Oo knows?" she said. "Fur be it from *me* to say. 'Ere to-day, an' goned to-morrow—per-reps to Greenland, perreps to a nevingly 'ome, but never knowin' 'ow nor when, an' packed horf without a momingt's notice, an' no leave harsked. Which there 's no sayin' where an' never will be, but Greenland as like as not."

"How did you enjoy your day's skating?" I asked, after a short pause.

"It never come to skatin'," replied Mrs. Green, still plunged in gloom. "What with me legs a-shootin' out reg'lar either be'ind or before, the momingt I laid to stand upon 'em, it 'ad n't no chanst of so doin'."

"But who can have persuaded you to try

such a dangerous thing ?" I asked, sympathetically.

" No one persuadid of me for to shoot me legs be'ind an' before, Miss, if that 's what you mean," said Mrs. Green, " it bein' a thing as took me by surprise an' honly done mos' unwillin'. But if you means 'oo took me hout a-skatin', it were a young man in the retail grocery as I met afore I merried me first."

She paused, and a wrathful flush rose to her cheek.

" 'E were a young feller as thought 'isself well hable for to do mos' things, let alone skatin', but soon was showed 'is little mistake. ' Hit 's as heasy as hanythink,' ses 'e, gay, me a-settin' on the bank a-tryin' for to look on the bright side of things an' me feet strapped on ter two knife-blades. ' You strikes out,' ses 'e, ' like this 'ere,' an' out 'e strook, me a-shriekin' to 'im to be careful, an' down 'e come a bump as sent the stars a-spreadin' hall hover the hice. ' Groun' 's a *leetle* rough just

there,' ses 'e, bright, when 'e come to. 'Get hup, 'Anna,' ses 'e, 'an' we 'll skate helsewhere,' ses 'e, but 'e did n't never get no further than that, for 'is feet rushed hout sudding, as it were, an' 'e startid doin' a dance sech as I 've never seed afore or hafter, an' never 'opes to see again. 'What *har* you a doin' of, Hedward?' ses I. 'In 'Eving's name stop kickin' like that 'ere,' ses I. 'I—can't—quite—keep—me balince, 'Anna,' ses 'e, breathless and smilin' pale, an' a-wavin' of 'is harms mos' dang'rous for to see. 'You ain't got none to keep, Hedward,' ses I, sewere, 'nor likely to 'ave till you stop a-stampin',' ses I, me feelin' giddy with his legs a-workin' ser quick. 'Don' fetch firs' one foot down an' then the hother like that 'ere,' ses I, for I seed at once where 'is fault lay; 'bring 'em both down together firm, an' stan' still,' ses I, incouragin' of 'im. But 'e were parst incouragin'. All on a sudding both 'is legs went different ways, an' down 'e come

on 'is back, an' lay a-gaspin'. Which by that time it jumped acrost me as 'ow 'e 'd thought too well on 'isself when 'e said 'e could skate.

"But I did n't want to be too 'ard on 'im," added Mrs. Green, with a sigh, "'e bein' a nan'some young feller, an' 'opin' soon to set hup for 'isself, which a bird in the 'and is worth two in the bush, 'owever pore, me first a-'angin' back at the time, as it were, through bein' a trifle gay-'earted for marridge."

"Was Edward much hurt, poor chap?" I inquired.

"Nothin' to speak of in the bones," answered Mrs. Green, thoughtfully; "but a good deal in the 'eart, as it were, which we hall on us knows is chiefly wanity—as ses the Scripchers —leastwise in man, the faults of wimming bein' hotherwise. Still, 'e kep' 'is sperrit up. 'I was a firs'-rate skater once,' ses 'e, when 'e got 'is breath back, 'but I 'm a leetle bit out o' practice now,' ses 'e, a-gettin' hup slow. 'Threes an' heights war n't nothin' to me in

them days,' ses 'e, a-dustin' of his trousis careless. 'Sixes and sevings comes heasy to you still, Hedward,' ses I, 'but never mind,' ses I, a-comfortin' on 'im. 'We can't hall on us be perfic' in the legs an' 'ead hany more than in the 'eart, which 'umble we hought hall for to be, never a-sayin' as 'ow we can do what it 's plain we carn't, an' rememberin' our faults careful, especially when on sech slippery hice as this 'ere. But perhaps it 'll come back to you in a bit,' ses I; 'elp me up, an' we 'll 'ave a try together.' So I gets careful to me feet, which 'ad it not been for me a-looking at 'em steady, an' a-noticin' as they grow'd at the hend of me legs, never should I 'a' known 'em to be mine, they feelin' more as if they belonged to the Hempress of China, or some such deformed person 'undrids of miles away —which I hallways takes sevings for me corns, but well hable hotherwise for to get inter threes—so 'e ketches 'old of me, an' I ketches 'old of 'im, an' before we could think on skatin'

or hanythink helse, our legs begins a-shootin' out mos' rapid an' bewilderin', like flies in water an' fully as useless, we a-stoppin' in the same spot the 'ole time. ' 'Old me up,' shrieks I. ' Lemme go,' yells 'e, an' 'e gives me a desprit shove as loosed me 'ands, an' away I shoots acrost the lake for hall the worl' like a harrow from a catapult. Never did I think for to come out on it alive! me bein' hunable for to stop meself, an' 'ardly able for to breathe with the strange feel on it. Which I shot along a-screamin' steady for to warn the people, a-knockin' sevril on 'em hover through a-comin' on 'em sudding from be'ind; but kep' me feet together an' me 'ead calm, if pale with fear an' serprise, a-shriekin' constant to the hend, an' a-bringin' up mos' sudding an' sewere hon the hopposite bank, which I rushed 'alf a mile hup the grass afore I stopped meself by fallin'."

Mrs. Green paused, breathless and red from the mere memory.

"Goodness!" said I, "it must have been dreadful."

"Dreadful it were," replied Mrs. Green, "an' enough for me. When I come to, I took me skates orf, an' I walked determined roun' the lake, an' there I foun' Hedward, still a-gettin' hup an' a-fallin' down busy in the same place, a-'opin' at some futur' time for to skate across, 'is conscience 'avin' awoke to coals o' fire, an' a-thinkin' pale an' hanxious as 'ow I was. still hon the hother side a-shootin' to me death. 'Ah,' ses I, loud an' sudding be'ind 'im, which 'e fell down again immeget with the start I give 'im, 'so that 's 'ow you treats the young lady you 're walkin' hout, do you, Hedward,' ses I, 'a-bringin' of 'er hon ter ice that slippery a hinsec' could n't walk upon it, much less skate,' ses I, 'an' then a-shootin' of 'er orf like a bullet from a gun instead of bein' a staff an' a prop to 'er, accordin' to request. No, thank you, Hedward,' ses I. 'Good-night to you, Hedward,'

ses I, calm. ' Doubtless you means well,' ses I, ' but this hends hall between us, an' hever will,' ses I, ' 'an'some or not 'an'some, shop or no shop, bird in the 'and, nor no bird in the 'and,' ses I, ' expectin' me letters, an' me lock of 'air, an' sech like tokings of affection as is no more an' never will be, by return to-night, an' trustin' you may be 'appy, Hedward, though hunderservin', which, if you takes my advice, you 'll come horf that there hice on your 'ands an' 'nees, seein' as 'ow hotherwise it 's mos' hunlikely you 'll hever get horf of it at all, good though you har at threes an' heights,' ses I, ' an' were it to come on a sudding thaw, drownded you would be through the hice a-meltin' hunderneath of you, a thing which though thus 'eart-broke an' deserted, fur be it from me for to wish,' ses I, kind, if calm."

Again Mrs. Green paused for breath.

" Dear me," I ejaculated. " And did you really break with him ? "

"From that momingt," said Mrs. Green, solemnly, "we spoke no more though meetin' constant in the street an' bowin' cold. Which 'Eving sent 'im 'is deserts, 'e a-takin' up with the shop girl at Blakesis, as wore dead folks' 'air in 'er 'ead, an' that dyed a different color to what' Eving 'd planned it when it first set out."

By this time we had arrived safely in the rectory grounds, and paused to bid each other good-night before Mrs. Green's front door. Mrs. Green gazed up at her fire-lit windows, and a slow smile overspread her countenance. She heaved a sigh.

"'Ere we are 'ome," she remarked, "an' no bones broke, for which let us hever be trewly thankful, harmen."

She paused, sighed once more, shook her head solemnly, and burst into poetry.

"'Ome, 'ome," she said, "ser-weet, ser-weet 'ome, be it never so numble, which we can't hall on us live in pallisis, of course, there 's no place like 'ome."

She looked at me in a kind of rapturous sternness, as one who challenged comment.

"Very true, Mrs. Green," I assented, hastily.

"Drawbacks there is a many," continued Mrs. Green. "Which where not? But with the drawbacks of 'ome you can deal sharp an' sewere, as it were, which not bein' the case with the drawbacks of hother people's 'omes leads to trials an' haggerawations. Halso, where tempers is sharp, hupsets."

At this moment a sudden crash issued from within the cottage, followed by a violent yell, and a sound as of gushing waters.

Mrs. Green started, and her countenance changed.

"If that is n't Green a-tryin' for to make 'is own tea, which time hafter time 'ave I told 'im never so for to do, through 'is hallways a-forgettin' for to take the kettle-'older an' a-burnin' of 'isself severe, besides a-dentin' of the kettle!" she ejaculated in one breath—

and the next instant the door slammed behind her.

From the muffled sounds which followed me as I walked towards the house, I judged that Mrs. Green was enjoying an excellent opportunity of dealing with a drawback of home in the manner recently described by her as "sharp an' sewere."

XV

"GOO'-BYE, MISS"

I WENT one evening to seek Mrs. Green. She was not in any of her accustomed haunts, and I had almost given her up when, upon the grass slope near the stables, I suddenly and unexpectedly came upon her.

The sight was startling.

She was running busily round and round in ever-widening circles—varied by spasmodic sideway leaps and accompanied by a perpetual shrieking—in a kind of stern, yet passionate, abandonment that filled me with surprise.

"Mrs. Green!" I cried. "What is the matter?"

Mrs. Green, as though moved by some un-

seen agency, instantly whirled about, and with a yet more piercing shriek came fleeing madly over the grass towards me.

The minute she perceived me—while still galloping busily over the grass—she waved her hand excitedly in the air, and plunged into a flood of earnest speech, not one word of which reached me till she had nearly done so herself, when the following sentence burst upon my ear:

"—— never no more, not heven for the Rector 'isself, as would be shocked to see a nelderly woman thus tore about the garding, the swine in the Scripchers bein' nothin' to it."

At this juncture it dawned upon me that Mrs. Green was engaged in her nightly task of taking my brother's large spaniel out for exercise, or rather the spaniel was engaged in taking her.

That he now, in spite of the whole of her not inconsiderable weight upon his collar, approached me merely with the kindest inten-

tions of bestowing a warm greeting upon me, I do not for a moment doubt; but unhappily he thought he saw a sparrow just beyond me, and, all gentler sentiment being at once merged in that abnormal sense of duty which appears to represent to some dogs the cure of the settling habit in birds as the one responsibility of their existence, he rushed madly past on my right side.

Mrs. Green, with a piercing shriek, flew by me on the left, with the result that, the chain catching me about the knees and bringing me sharply round, the three of us fled despairingly down the slope together. I shrieked to Mrs. Green to let go the chain. Mrs. Green shrieked because she always shrieks when moving at all rapidly—yet with a kind of business-like thoughtfulness, as one preoccupied in reality with deeper matters, and ready to revert to them on the immediate passing of the crisis—and the spaniel, pleased with the excitement he believed us to be evincing in the chase,

barked in an ecstacy of approval as he bore us onward.

Thus we rushed precipitately into the kitchen-garden wall at the foot of the slope, when the spaniel sat down with an amiable expression and hung several yards of tongue out of his mouth, and Mrs. Green instantly continued the conversation which, with intervals for shrieks, she had commenced to breathlessly deliver during our hurried flight.

As before, she only became audible in the middle of a sentence:

"—— bit by a dormouse an' bore horf by a chill soon arterwards in consequence, which never no more will I take Master Dennis's dorg hout, an' so I shall tell 'im to-morrer plain, the keepin' of hall hanimals bein' a thing as no one but a borned Semuel hought to dream of hattemptin', an' then honly when in the best of 'ealth."

"You mean Samson, Mrs. Green," said I—from sheer force of habit—between my gasps.

"Which well might I mean *hanythink* with me legs a-tremblin' hunder me in the way they 're a-doin' of," said Mrs. Green, faintly, leaning against the wall, and fanning herself with her apron.

For the space of several minutes we panted together in silence.

"I came to tell you a piece of news, Mrs. Green," I said, when I had recovered my breath.

"*Noos*," repeated Mrs. Green, instantly ceasing to pant. "*Never!*"

"News of a sort," I replied; "I 'm going away." There was a short pause.

"An' *hallways* 'ave I said that no one need n't never despair, let 'em hage *hever*so," said Mrs. Green, solemnly and emphatically; "an' better late than never, as it were, which we hall on hus feared secret might be the case, if puttin' a brave face hon the matter in publick, so to speak. I gives you joy, Miss, an' may all 'appiness fall upon you now an' for

hevermore; which if not too bold, what might 'is name be?"

"Oh, it is n't *that*," I said, hastily.

"It *is n't?*" said Mrs. Green, incredulously.

"I 'm afraid not," said I.

There was a pregnant silence.

"*No* chanst, as it were?" inquired Mrs. Green, gloomily.

"None whatever," said I, firmly.

"Ah, I 'oped too soon," said Mrs. Green, after a further moment of bitter reflection, and she groaned with disappointment.

"I don't quite know how long I shall be away," I continued.

Mrs. Green, as one struck by a new idea, glanced at me, paused, glanced again.

"*Make* it hup, Miss," she said, suddenly, in tones of strong persuasive encouragement. "*Make* it hup! The best of parients 'as their little ways, as well I knows, me hown father 'avin' cut me 'ead open with 'alf a brick sevril times when a little hover-took, so to speak;

but we hall on us 'as our faults, heven rectors an' bishops an' sech, though lookin' mos' peaceful when surpliced in church, white hallways 'avin' that effec', of course, as is misleadin', if 'oly.

"Let hus therefore forgive heach hother kin'," continued Mrs. Green, raising her voice, and launching into morals with a solemn wave of the arm, "for to go away a-broodin' hover hinjuries, 'owever sewere, is bad for the complexshun as well as the 'ealth; an' let hus hallways remember the good little pome as ses ser pious, 'Birds in their little nestes hagree,' which is the las' thing they thinks of doin', as hanyone can tell a-listenin' to the starlings on a summer's mornin', but meant mos' 'elpful, an' as sech to be took."

"It is n't that, either, Mrs. Green," said I meditatively, when I had unravelled the meaning of her remarks.

"Not?" said Mrs. Green, looking at me thoughtfully.

"No," said I.

"Sure?" said Mrs. Green, encouragingly.

"Quite," said I.

"No shame to *hanyone*, you know, Miss, if so," said Mrs. Green, reassuringly, "bein' natchrul if sorrerful an' 'ardly respectibul in a clergyman's fam'ly."

"I know," said I, "but it really is n't that."

"Then whaffor?" said Mrs. Green, flushing with sudden indignation.

"Work," said I, meekly.

Mrs. Green started violently.

"Work!" she ejaculated. "Never! An' what work?"

"Writing," said I, still more meekly.

Mrs. Green literally snorted with wrath.

"I *thought* so!" she said, bitterly. "I *thought* so! I 've 'ad me suspicions hall along! Work, you calls it—a-settin' scribblin' in a nicy bedroom, with a pair of cheeks on you like purpil plums, if thinner, a ruinin' of

your hyes, an' a missin' hall chanst of marridge through lookin' that wore. Work! I calls it nonsince, an' as sech to be put a stop to sewere. An' what his it when hall 's said an' done? Sevril sheets of paper tore in bits, as many 's the time I 've seen it when a-doin' of your room—an' nothin' more."

"Oh! a little more, I hope, Mrs. Green," said I, deprecatingly.

"Don' you 'ope it," said Mrs. Green, emphatically. "It won't never be nothin' more! An' now a-leavin' of a nappy 'ome for to set an' scribble in a nicy bedroom helsewhere! What we 're a-comin' to nowadays it beats me to think. Which well I knows what sech doin's leads to, me 'avin' 'ad the hacquaintance of a young man in the costermonger line when in service at Yarmouth as went orf 'is 'ead it 'avin' hallways been that weak, pore young feller, through a-tryin' for to write po'try as droove 'im mad through never rhymin'. Which 'e 'ad some excoose, 'is mind

bein' feeble, but no sech existin' in the present case—at least, so fur as we knows at present, if never certing," added Mrs. Green, in a thoughtful aside—"take me hadvice, Miss, an' fight again' it."

"I 'm afraid I can't, Mrs. Green," said I, uncertainly.

"An' what does your pa an' ma say?" asked Mrs. Green, pausing with sudden hope.

"Nothing much," said I.

"They would n't," said Mrs. Green, relapsing into bitter reflection. "They never does, when they 'd better; and when they 'd better not, they does. That 's the way of parients."

"You see, I 'm writing a sort of a book," I explained.

Mrs. Green sniffed.

"An' what about?" she demanded. "Fus' tell me that!"

"About—er—about—about several things, Mrs. Green," I said, hastily.

"You *carn'* tell me, you see," said Mrs.

Green, rapidly and triumphantly. "An' I knowed you could n't! An' *why* carn't you?"

The reason did not happen to be one I could very well explain to Mrs. Green.

"I don't know," I said, feebly.

"An' I knowed you did n't," said Mrs. Green, gloomily.

"It was jus' the same with that pore young chap in the costermonger line! Never did 'e know what 'is po'try was about, an' it drove 'im wil' a-tryin' for to think. The mad-'ouse —that 's where it hall hends! if not first bore horff with pewnomia through a-settin' steady in hicy bedrooms. But there ain't no use a-sayin' nothin'! If you 're a-goin', you 're a-goin'; an' whathever hothers 'opes as knows little of sech matters, never do I heggspec' for to see you a-smilin' ser wide an' 'appy again as you 're a-doin' now, excep' in a mad-'ouse, where they smiles hall day at nothink, so to speak. Goo'-bye, Miss; an' you mark me words."

"But I 'm not gone yet, Mrs. Green," I said, striving to throw hope into my tone.

"As near as near," said Mrs. Green, mournfully. "An' never no more comfrerble talks nor nothink; which sech is life, an' goo'-bye, Miss."

We shook hands with the utmost solemnity, and Mrs. Green, in unspeakable dignity, commenced to move slowly and tragically away. But seldom are we able to carry out in their full glory the dramatic exits we feel befit us best.

The spaniel thought he saw another sparrow in the distance. He bounded madly in the air. Mrs. Green's dignity disappeared suddenly, and she clutched the chain with a paling countenance. The spaniel, without further ado, departed swiftly to the chase—and Mrs. Green, emitting a despairing shriek, departed also. Shortly afterwards, just as I reached the house, I heard a final scream and a severe thud, which betokened that the spaniel had at

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THE END.

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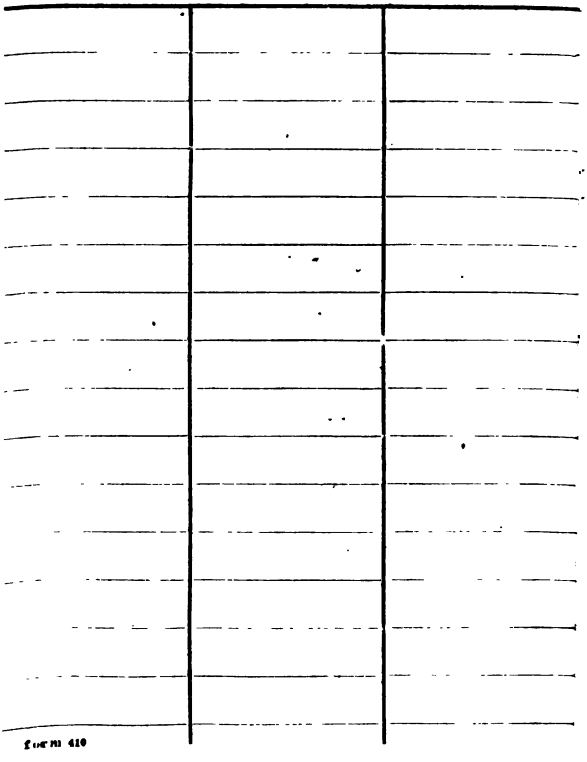

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